

OLIVER

B. PAUL NEUMAN

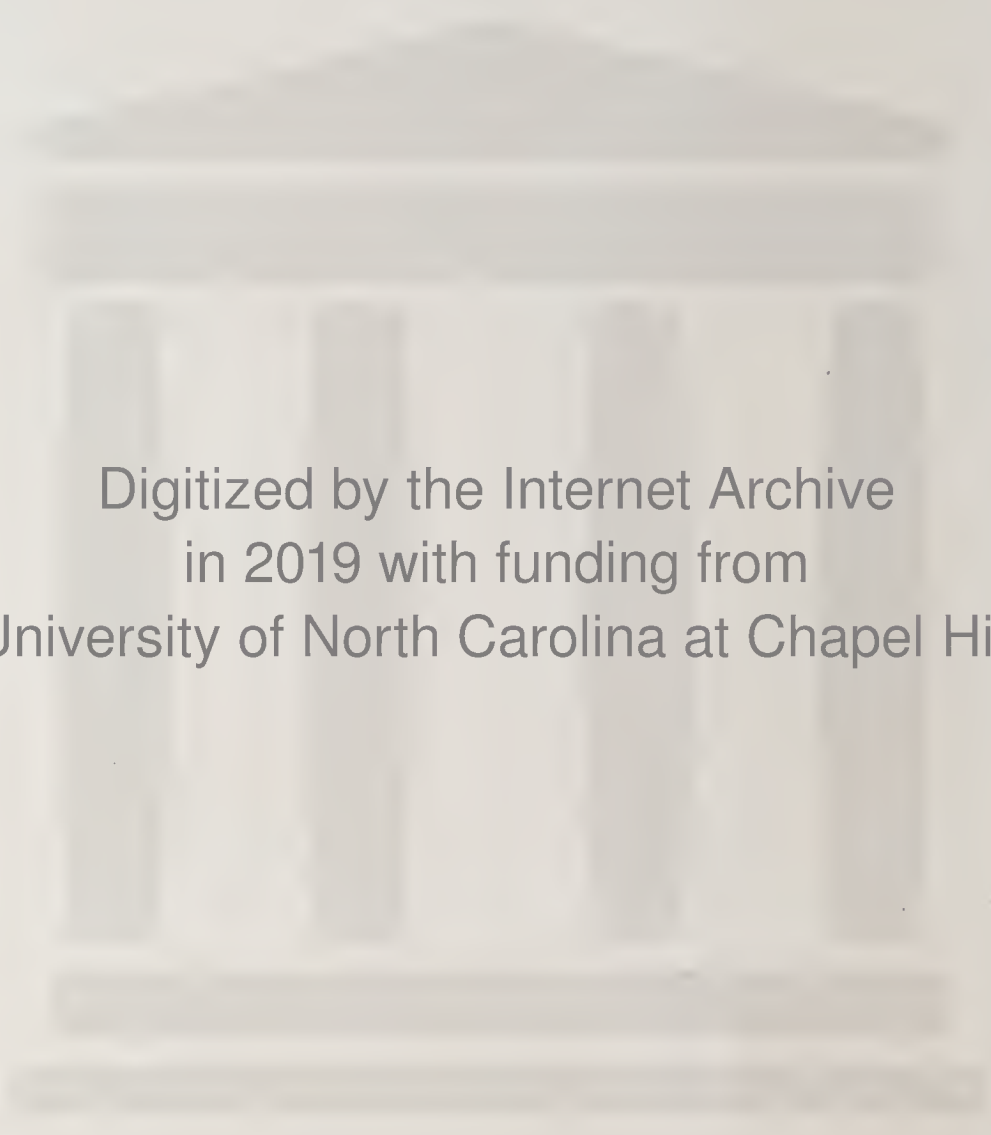




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OLIVER

NOVELS AND TALES BY  
B. PAUL NEUMAN

THE INTERPRETER'S HOUSE

RAYMOND'S FOLLY

THE SUPPLANTER

A VILLAIN OF PARTS

THE UTTERMOST FARTHING

THE STORY OF ROGER KING

THE GREATNESS OF JOSIAH PORLICK

THE SPOILS OF VICTORY

DOMINY'S DOLLARS

THE LONE HEIGHTS

RODDLES

SIMON BRANDIN

OPEN SESAME

CHIGNETT STREET

THE RISE AND GLORY OF THE  
WESTELL-BROWNS



# OLIVER

BY

B. PAUL NEUMAN

*“Trust Life”*

SECOND IMPRESSION

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# OLIVER

## BOOK I

### I

“As hard as nails, and as tough as a wireworm,” said Mr. Bleek, who was an ironmonger by trade and a gardener by inclination.

The reference was to old Mr. Grimwood, and Mrs. Axton, to whom the remark was addressed, immediately capped the similes with a feminine addition of her own.

“Yes,” she exclaimed, “and as sharp as a needle.”

The compliments were all the more significant because neither the lady nor the gentleman had more than a passing acquaintance with Mr. Grimwood. He usually spent the month of September at Lowestoft, and—on principle—he changed his apartments with every visit. If you go twice to the same lodgings, he declared, the harpies think you can’t do without them. Mrs. Axton had been one of the harpies, and she recognised her former lodger as he was leaving Bleek’s shop after a long and—towards the end—acrimonious dispute over the return of a razor

which Mr. Grimwood loudly denounced as "a perfect fraud."

Martin Grimwood at this time was a man of about sixty years. Neither in physique nor in general appearance was there anything about him in the least arresting. He was slightly under the middle height, of a dark, sallow complexion. His straight, black hair was only just beginning to show streaks of grey. His clean-shaven face was rather small and distinctly narrow, tapering towards the chin, so that his forehead looked broader than its actual measurements. His eyes were dark, dull, and expressionless, but the deep-cut lines round his mouth gave an impression of gloom. There was nothing to suggest any great ability or force of character, except, perhaps, in the direction of obstinacy. Yet, as a matter of fact, he had been a very successful man, and had quietly forced his way up from a very low rung of the ladder to a good way past the middle. Beginning as a plumber's mate, he had, after some years as a plumber, opened an ironmongery shop, and by the time he was forty had begun to build in a small way. Building, he soon found, was evidently his mark. A sure instinct seemed to guide him when to start his operations and what kind of houses to put up. Once launched on this adventure, he went from strength to strength, and soon found himself on the high road to a fortune. His wife died before his triumph had been achieved, leaving, as her legacy to him, a small and delicate child, a little boy of four. A



widowed sister, a Mrs. Bannock, came to keep house for him, a lady as unlike her brother as could well be imagined. Neither time, nor trouble—and she had known a good deal—had been able to subdue her natural sprightliness. Her love of pleasure, kept, as it was, within very narrow bounds, made the house a much more cheerful place than it would have been if Martin had reigned alone.

Mrs. Grimwood had been a domestic servant in what is generally known as “good” service, and at the time of his marriage Martin had already got on so far that she and her family felt that she was doing exceedingly well for herself. He shared the feeling, but he had known her since she was a child, and he was really fond of her. Moreover, fickleness was not one of his faults, and the fact that a good many people advised him to throw her over stiffened his resolution to make her his wife. She was seven or eight years younger than he, a slim, fair, pretty girl with a happy disposition and delicate, refined manners that he greatly admired. He was not only fond but proud of her, and during their brief married life he showed at his best. Masterful he always was, and would be; selfish too; but love was present, and the alloy looked uncommonly well. It shone like eighteen-carat gold when Oliver was born, for those were days when everything seemed to smile upon the proud and happy father. He had always been a careful young man with his money—“near,” some critics had

already begun to call him—but now he tasted the joys of generosity and lavished what were for them luxuries on his wife.

When the child was about six months old, he moved from Camberwell to Avenue Road, Regent's Park, where he bought a good-sized house with a large garden, in which little Oliver learned to walk and run. He was a pretty, fair-haired boy with a strong likeness to his mother, but recalling his father too in the outline of his face—the tapering chin, and the forehead made to look broad by comparison.

The death of his wife came to Martin Grimwood as a sudden and stupefying blow. She had never been robust and one or two members of her family had died from consumption, but, in her case, the fell disease developed and ran its course with unusual rapidity. At first Martin pooh-poohed the danger, but when he realised its gravity he fought against it with a furious energy that did, perhaps, more harm than good. General practitioners, specialists, faddists, quacks—they followed one another hot-foot to and from Avenue Road. When the brief struggle was over, he abandoned himself for a while to an excess of grief, morbid and sometimes childish in its manifestations. For days he could only be coaxed with difficulty to eat, and sat in gloomy silence like a sulky child. He threw himself into paroxysms of passionate invective against the fate that had marred his life, and he loudly and coarsely renounced his allegiance to a God who had never been to him more than a name,



or at any rate a convention. During those first days of his loss he took no notice at all of his child, nor even asked after him, and he refused to give instructions with reference to business matters of the most pressing urgency. Gradually, he began to recover, but though he regained his normal physical health and all his keenness of brain and tenacity of resolve, in other ways he was a changed man. Perhaps the change was in the nature of a reversion to what he had been, or had promised to be. The possibilities of a brighter, happier manhood, that had shown themselves during his brief married life, fell like withered leaves.

It was during the last weeks of his wife's illness that his sister, Mrs. Bannock, had come to stay in the house, and she had been of great service. Mrs. Grimwood had taken to her and so had the child. Even the servants obeyed her cheerfully, and Martin enjoyed gossiping with her over the days of their childhood. During those dark days that followed the funeral, she stopped on, without anything being said, as the only person competent and available to manage the household. It was one of the early signs of Martin's recovery that he spoke to her on the subject.

"Meat's tender," he remarked at dinner.

His gloomy silence at meals had been a sore trial to the sprightly lady, and she welcomed this breaking of the ice as the herald of spring.

"Yes, it is," she said; "it's good meat, and

it's well cooked. There's nothing to beat wing ribs if you can get the butcher to cut fair."

He laid down his knife and fork and looked at her steadily for a minute. The servant had gone out of the room.

"Are you comfortable here, Alice?" he asked.

"Perfectly," she answered. "When I'm by myself, it's scrag of mutton, and I'm like you—I prefer ribs of beef."

He nodded gravely.

"And you think you can stand the child?"

"He's a little darling," she cried enthusiastically.

"Oh, of course," he answered, "but I wish you could say 'yes' or 'no' to a plain question."

"Well, then, I can stand him."

"Why not stop on, then?"

"Barkis is willin'," she replied with a smile.

"Who the devil's Barkis?" he demanded roughly. He disliked allusions that he did not understand, and suspected his sister of a disposition to show off.

"He's a character in a book I've been reading," she informed him.

"Ah, a novel, I've no doubt. I should have thought you'd more sense than to waste your time on such trash. Very well, we understand each other, then. What do you want me to pay you?"

"I don't know why you should pay me anything," she said. "I get my board and lodging, and I've got a good appetite. And I like living in a comfortable house."

“What do you say to fifty pounds ? ” he asked.

“More than enough—it’s very generous of you, Martin.”

“That’s settled, then,” he said, and relapsed into silence.

## II

Under Mrs. Bannock’s watchful care, little Oliver bade fair to grow out of his delicacy. When he was nearly six, she mooted the question of education, and Martin at once suggested the nearest national school.

Mrs. Bannock was horrified.

“It’s throwing away all the advantages you have won for yourself,” she protested. “If you were a mate, or even a plumber, it might be all right, but for a man in your position it would be simply a scandal.”

“I don’t see it,” he answered. “The teaching’s all right, and I don’t want my boy to grow up a snob. He mayn’t have to make his way, but I mean him to be able to. I’m not going to keep him in cotton wool.”

“It makes a lot of difference to a man what sort of school he went to when he was a boy,” she persisted. “It gives him a good start and the start’s half the race.”

Martin made no answer at the time, but at supper, the following Sunday, he reopened the subject.

“Where would you send the boy ? ” he said abruptly.



“ Send Oliver ? ” she asked, taken aback for the moment.

“ Yes, to what school ? ” he said, impatiently.

“ Oh yes. Why, I should send him to Dr. Arkwright’s. They say Miss Arkwright, who takes the little boys, is admirable.”

“ Very well; see about it, then.”

So a few days after his sixth birthday, Oliver was solemnly escorted to school for the first time by Mrs. Bannock and handed over by her to Miss Arkwright, a tall, rather good-looking young woman with a wealth of fluffy, flaxen hair, and a stoop that suggested constant bending down to very small children.

The school would hardly have passed muster at the present day. It was a strictly family affair. Dr. Arkwright was a white-haired, pursy old gentleman, whose degree was an American mystery. He took the highest classes—girls only—in mathematics, science, and universal history. Mrs. Arkwright, thin and worried, contributed religious knowledge, needlework, and English composition, while Miss Alma Arkwright taught music (vocal and instrumental), and drawing and painting. Outside help, in the person of a small but fierce-looking German professor, was invoked for modern languages, all of which—except English—he was reputed to know perfectly and speak fluently. He himself, it should in justice be added, allowed no single exception. The eldest sister, whose Christian name was Philippa, looked after the very small children, while Miss Barbara attended to the

domestic arrangements, dragooned the two small servant girls, wheedled the tradespeople, and, week by week, wrestled with the same intractable problem—how to make one shilling do the work of two.

One of the striking features of this industrious family was their thoroughgoing, sincere admiration for each other. To his wife and daughters Dr. Arkwright was a compendium of all the virtues, as well as of all the wisdom, attainable by humanity. He, on his side, was never weary of extolling the unparalleled excellencies of his wife, her maiden beauty, the number and eminence of her suitors, and her unfailing loyalty and sagacity. As to their daughters, both Dr. and Mrs. Arkwright were simply at a loss which to place first—Philippa's genius for child-management, Alma's superb artistic attainments, or Barbara's consummate skill in household affairs.

The house itself and its equipment as a school were hardly worthy of the distinguished staff. The former, a two-storied, double-fronted "villa" in Lisbourne Road, had been let at a low rent on the understanding that very little should be done to it in the way of repair, and next to nothing in the way of decoration. As the Arkwrights had occupied it for more than five years, it was now in a highly disreputable condition, and each winter the Doctor solemnly declared that "something must really be done in the spring."

The furniture matched the house. A more extraordinary collection of incongruous odds

and ends it would be hard to imagine. A worm-eaten old mahogany dining-table was kept in countenance by a cheap veneered sideboard from Tottenham Court Road. The dining-room chairs were a lot of drawing-room samples taken, instead of fees, from a furniture dealer whose school accounts had fallen in arrear. The only room in the house that was at all presentable was the little third room on the ground floor. A tall mirror resting on a console-table, two of the sample chairs, a low arm-chair, and a small round, polished walnut table in the middle of the room, were its chief features, while some half dozen drawings and paintings served at once to advertise Miss Alma's genius and to cover the faded wall-paper.

In this temple of the shabby-genteel, Oliver was initiated into the mysteries of letters. He was not absolutely ignorant. His mother had taught him the alphabet, and he could read very short and simple words. But a good many of the other children were a year or two older than he; indeed he was the youngest in the school. Quaintly dressed, even for those days, in a small black tunic gathered round the waist with a belt and fastened in front by a row of shiny black buttons that ran diagonally from his left shoulder to his right hip, with his flaxen hair covered by a peaked Leghorn cap, he was a strange, appealing little figure. Miss Philippa took to him from the first, and made so much of him that two or three of the former favourites became jealous, and looked upon the new-comer



with unfriendly eyes. These were boys a year or two older, and they would have made things very uncomfortable for Oliver had it not been for the vigilance of Miss Philippa and some of the elder girls. Even as it was, he did go home weeping one night, Willie Browne having threatened to bring his dog Trusty and set him on the new boy. So frightened was Oliver at this menace that it was with the greatest difficulty he could be induced to go to school the next morning. Then Miss Philippa took him in hand and soon found out the guilty party. She managed the affair, however, with considerable prudence, for thenceforth Willie gave no more trouble, but left Oliver severely alone, and shortly afterwards quitted Dr. Arkwright's for a regular preparatory school.

### III

Before Oliver had been a month at The Seminary—so the Arkwrights' house was called—Miss Philippa found out that he was uncommonly bright. There was no difficulty in teaching him to read—he was eager to learn. Writing was stiffer work, but his little fingers were nimble, and he soon began to make excellent progress. Arithmetic was another matter. This was the only branch of learning to which his father attached any importance, and it was a great disappointment when Miss Philippa had to admit that her favourite was distinctly slow at

figures. Mrs. Bannock, indeed, thought the matter of very little importance, and only mentioned the teacher's verdict as an item of gossip. She was astonished and alarmed at the effect it produced.

"Oliver," said his father loudly, "listen to me. I wish you to work hard at your sums. You're six, and I'm told you can't add properly. That won't do at all. If you go on like that, you'll never be any good at all in the world. I shall ask every week how you have got on, and if I hear that you've done badly I shall whip you."

Oliver hung his head, and his little cheeks flushed scarlet. Mrs. Bannock, angry with herself for having "told," and with his father for the use he had made of the information, hastened to intervene.

"There will be no need for anything so disagreeable, I am quite sure," she said. "Oliver is a very sensible boy, and now that he knows you wish him to take pains over his sums, he will do so."

"I hope so," said Martin shortly, and dismissed the subject. But, week by week, he made inquiries, and Mrs. Bannock, now on her guard, always brought a favourable report. Nor had she to wrong her conscience in the matter, for Oliver appeared thoroughly frightened, and was constantly asking Miss Philippa whether he was getting on with his sums. At first she was puzzled.

"You'll soon get on, if you take pains as

you're doing now," she told him, "but why do you keep on asking me?"

He looked up at her with serious eyes in which the fear showed plainly.

"My father will be angry if I don't get on," he said, the quick tears showing.

Miss Philippa was not impulsive, but she had become fond of the child, and something in his face and voice touched her sharply. The others had gone, and Oliver was waiting to be fetched. She sat down and lifted him on her knee.

"You mustn't be afraid," she said. "Boys must be brave. You know my father, Oliver—Dr. Arkwright?"

Oliver nodded.

"Well, when he was a boy of ten he was chased by a bull in a field. He ran as fast as he could."

"He wasn't as fat as he is now, was he?" asked Oliver who was deeply interested.

Miss Philippa was a little shocked, but she saw that there was no irreverence in the question.

"No, of course not," she answered. "He knew that if the bull caught him it would toss him in the air and probably kill him, so he ran to try and reach a gate, but before he could get to it, the bull was close upon him."

"Did it catch him?"

"Well, my father turned round and faced it. Fancy that! Only a boy of ten!"

"Was the bull frightened?"

"Yes, it was. Think of that, Oliver. It



was a hundred times as strong as my father, but it was cowed by his courage."

Oliver looked up at her.

"Did it make it a cow?"

Miss Philippa's wits were not agile.

"Whatever do you mean, child?" she asked a trifle impatiently.

"You said it was cowed," he persisted.

"That's a very silly way to talk," she said severely. "I shan't tell you stories about Dr. Arkwright if you say such things."

"I didn't know it was silly," he answered gravely. "Please tell me another."

But no other instance of Dr. Arkwright's bravery was available on the spur of the moment.

On his seventh birthday, as it happened, Oliver was promoted from the very small children and the breakfast room in the basement, to the lowest class in the upper school and the ground floor. He thus came for the first time into close personal relations with Dr. Arkwright himself, who at the outset was grievously disappointed in his new pupil.

"You did not tell me, Philippa," he said to his eldest daughter, after the first lesson, "what a very dull boy that little Grimwood is."

"He isn't good at figures," she replied, "but at some things he's as bright as a new pin. He'll read almost anything you give him."

"Ah, well," remarked Dr. Arkwright with an eye on extras, "a little special coaching later on may help him."

Mrs. Arkwright gave a much more favourable

report. He learned his Scripture verses perfectly, and repeated them with such taste and feeling that it was delightful to hear him ; and in the exercises which she called " oral composition " he very soon went to the top of the class.

As for Miss Alma, she was quite enthusiastic. " He's got a wonderful touch," she assured Mrs. Bannock, " and his reading is quite remarkable for such a child. Time and fingering he finds difficult, but so do almost all children. And I don't know when I've seen a child of his age take to drawing as he does."

As a matter of fact, Oliver did make very rapid progress in his music. Miss Alma was quite right ; his touch was curiously good for a child of his age, and the obvious enjoyment with which he played his little pieces lent a real charm to the performance. He had been learning the piano about nine months when the annual prize-giving fell due.

" Oliver Grimwood must play *La Sonnambula*," Miss Alma declared. " You'll see ; all the mothers will want to kiss him."

" And he must certainly recite *The Pilgrim Fathers*," added Mrs. Arkwright. " There's no one else in the school who could do it half as well."

The prize-giving was a function of the mildest possible description. It took place in the afternoon, and the Rev. Mr. Hetley of All Saints' presided. All the chairs and forms in the house were crowded into the dining-room for the benefit of the parents, while the young ladies stood in rows behind. Facing the audience was

the piano, and, framed by the bay of the window, in three arm-chairs, sat Dr. and Mrs. Arkwright and—between them—Mr. Hetley. There were very few fathers present, but among them was Martin Grimwood. He had received a stately invitation by post a fortnight before, and Mrs. Bannock had reminded him, but obviously without the smallest expectation of his going. Indeed, she could hardly believe her ears when he answered testily :

“To-morrow week at 4.30. Of course I remember it. What do you suppose I keep a diary for? It’s a stupid time to fix, but, as it happens, I shall be free.”

It was a very warm afternoon, and what with the young ladies at the back, and the parents in front, the atmosphere soon became terribly stuffy. Mr. Grimwood, with Mrs. Bannock, sat in the front row, and was very much put out at the lack of punctuality.

“Not a notion of the value of time,” he grunted, after consulting his watch and closing the case with a click that could be heard all over the room. At any rate Dr. Arkwright heard it, for he rose immediately and said in his thick, unctuous voice :

“The Rev. Mr. Hetley will now engage in prayer.”

After the prayer, Miss Alma sat down at the piano and six of the girls sang a carol—pretty, if unseasonable. Then Mr. Hetley made a little speech. The vicar, who in prayer succeeded in divesting his voice of all expression, made up



for it in oratory by the most lavish use of emphasis, so that many founts of type would be needed to do justice to the result. The following gives only a faint echo :

“My *dear* friends,—It gives me *very great* pleasure to be here this afternoon. The sweet strains to which we have just listened, with their hallowed associations, are but a foretaste of pleasures yet to come. But it is not simply the anticipation of pleasure, however pure and refined, that has brought me here to-day. Nor is it even the respect and affection which I cherish for my *dear* friends, Dr. and Mrs. Arkwright and their *highly gifted* family. No ; I have come here at the *solemn* and *imperious* call of DUTY. The education of the young is a *truly* religious work, and to hold up the hands of those who are engaged in it, is, or ought to be, at once the *joy* and *privilege* and *bounden duty* of the clergy. I do hope, my dear young friends, whom I now see before me at what I may call the back of the room, that you will always remember even in the youthful ardour of your intellectual pursuits, that these things can never satisfy the aspirations of your souls. It is *character*, not learning, that tells in the end, both in this life and in that which is to come. In this *admirable* establishment of which you and your dear parents and all of us are so justly proud, you are taught, I know, in such a way that learning becomes not a task but a delight. Other and *higher* claims, however, are here, I rejoice to say, recognised by your *beloved* and *esteemed instructors*, so that

there is no need for me to labour the point, *vitally* important as it is.

“ I now come to what is to you the most important part of our proceedings this afternoon. I mean the distribution of the prizes. As a rule I do not approve of prizes. The only fit reward of knowledge *is* knowledge ; the only fit reward of goodness *is* goodness. To recompense virtue by expensive gewgaws is, in my opinion, an insult to the recipient. I have seen tables *groaning* beneath the weight of gaudily bound volumes ; I have even—I must confess it—received some of them myself, but all they have done has been to minister to *pride* and *self-conceit*. How much better these simple and elegant gifts which are symbolic, and teach a lesson as well as confer a distinction.”

Mr. Hetley paused and looked down at the table, which, though indeed not built on the heroic scale—being in fact a somewhat flimsy, veneered affair—certainly gave no evidence of groaning. It would have been strange if it had, for it supported nothing heavier than some dozen illuminated cards, each set in a fretwork frame and decorated with bows of silk ribbon which, like the cards themselves, had been prepared by the deft fingers of Miss Alma. The centre-piece, as it were, of all these little dishes was an elegant wreath of what the greengrocer had supplied as laurel, fastened with a super-bow of white satin.

One by one the Vicar lifted the cards and announced the names of the fortunate or deserving

winners. There were four classes in the "upper school," and two or three cards were allotted to each class. As the prettily dressed girls came up, flushed and smiling, and made their elegant curtseys, a gentle sound of such applause as gloved hands can bestow was heard. Then Mr. Hetley smiled.

"To the Junior Department," he said, "so admirably conducted by Miss Philippa Arkwright, the inferior sex are allowed admission, and, as one of them myself, I am proud to say the prize has been gained by a boy, Master Oliver Grimwood."

Oliver had been sitting between his father and Mrs. Bannock. The prize-list had been kept a profound secret, so that to all three the announcement came as a surprise. Mrs. Bannock was delighted.

"You must go up and take your prize," she whispered. "Don't forget to bow and say 'thank you, sir.'"

Oliver had a new suit for the occasion, and the dark-green velvet jacket and knickers set off his trim little figure to great advantage. His face, with the delicate features, the shining eyes and the fair, soft skin, looked really beautiful, and a whispered chorus of admiration greeted him as he made his bow and came back to his seat. Even Martin's grim face relaxed as he stooped and said, "Good boy. I'll give you a prize worth having."

It was the first time Oliver had heard his father speak to him in such a tone, and in a



moment the tears were in his eyes. Fortunately Martin did not see this sign of effeminacy, and the child soon recovered. Indeed, by the time the laurel wreath was being presented to Sophie Zanetti for "general excellence" he was laughing and clapping his hands, for Sophie was one of his great friends. She was a girl of fourteen, exceedingly pretty in what Mrs. Bannock called "a foreign-looking sort of way," perfectly self-possessed, very daring, and so generous that all the younger girls worshipped her. She had taken a good deal of notice of Oliver lately, calling him her little brother, petting him and playing with him, and in return he thought her the most beautiful, the cleverest, and the best of living creatures. Later in the afternoon, when he climbed the music-stool and played his piece, she, at his earnest request, stood by the venerable piano and turned over the one loose page of *La Sonnambula*, counting for him under her breath, and encouraging him with her fearless smile. It was she again who, seated behind a screen, held a copy of Mrs. Hemans's *Poems*, ready to prompt him as he recited "The breaking waves dashed high." Both the performances were very successful, but few of the audience understood how much the success was due to Sophie.

After the entertainment was over, the young ladies brought round cups of tea and plates of very mixed biscuits. When justice had been done to these, the company stood up. Mr. Hetley, after his third cup of tea, hastened off

to another engagement, Mrs. Arkwright and her daughters divided the family attentions between the most influential of the mothers, and the great Dr. Arkwright himself sought out and shook hands with Martin Grimwood.

“I am, and my dear wife and daughters are, very glad to see you beneath our roof, and to make your personal acquaintance,” he said, speaking with his own inimitable blend of fawning condescension. “We are greatly encouraged and heartened in our work—which is arduous and sometimes very trying—by the presence among us of men of affairs such as yourself.”

The phrase “men of affairs” puzzled Martin. His shrewd instincts told him that the old man was a pompous humbug, yet his assurance, and his mastery of what seemed almost like a strange language placed him in a position of vantage.

“Your little son,” Dr. Arkwright went on, as Martin made no reply, “has a very sweet and a very engaging personality. He is a great favourite with all of us.”

“I don’t want him to be sweet and engaging,” said Martin roughly. “I hate to see a boy blush and smirk like a girl.”

Dr. Arkwright held up his fat hand with a regular pulpit gesture.

“You need not be afraid, my dear sir. The boy in all his racy vigour and robustness will reveal himself quite soon enough, and the softer, gentler influences under which he has grown up

will then save him from that rude lawlessness and blatant vulgarity which, I grieve to say, so often disfigure the youths of the middle and upper classes."

"They're young devils, that's true enough," Martin grunted, "but I'd rather see Oliver a devil than a milksop."

"He'll be a Man," exclaimed Dr. Arkwright impressively, "a Man in the best and noblest sense of the word. A gentleman and a scholar," he added, with persuasive emphasis, nearly closing his eyes, and peering cunningly at his visitor from the narrow slit.

"The very things I don't want him to be!" cried Martin, so explosively that the Doctor's eyes jerked wide open, and he involuntarily took a step backwards. "I mean him to be a plain business man with education enough to make money and not too much to keep it. The gentlemen and scholars I've known are better at spending than at making it."

Dr. Arkwright flushed.

"You are rather hard on us," he remarked, drawing himself up.

Martin was not in the least impressed.

"Oh I wasn't thinking of you," he said. "Education's your business, isn't it? I hope, for Oliver's sake, that you're good at it. What are you looking at me like that for?"

This last remark was addressed to Sophie Zanetti, who had come up behind Dr. Arkwright and was smiling at Martin.

"Because I want to ask you something," she



answered, and there was neither smirk nor blush upon her face.

“ Well, what is it ? ” he asked.

“ May Oliver come to tea with us ? ” she asked.

“ Mama was going to ask you herself but she had to leave early, and she said I might do it in her name. Any afternoon this week or next. We’ll send him back in the carriage.”

“ The carriage ” impressed Martin ; so did Sophie herself, though her foreign name had prejudiced him against her. But he liked the way she fronted him and asked her question without a trace of nervousness or hesitation. And he liked her clear, fresh young voice, especially after the schoolmaster’s unctuous snuffle.

“ You want him on approval,” he said, something like a smile flickering across his grave face, “ to be returned if he doesn’t come up to expectations, eh ? ”

“ We’ll buy him, if the price isn’t too high. They owe me a birthday present.”

“ Sophie, my dear child,” exclaimed Dr. Arkwright, shocked. “ Mr. Grimwood must excuse you. You are excited.”

“ Try and excite Oliver then,” said Martin, still looking hard at her ; “ it’s what he wants. You go and settle the day with Mrs. Bannock—there she is, in that brown dress. And tell Oliver I said he was to go. No shyness or any nonsense of that sort.”

“ Oh, nobody’s shy with me,” she answered, and ran off to the brown dress.

## IV

Mrs. Zanetti was a widowed lady who lived in Hamilton Terrace. The house was old-fashioned but it was also very comfortable, and there was an unusually large garden, at the end of which was a long pergola so covered with creepers that even in full sunlight it was almost dark. Where the leaves were thickest and the shade deepest, stood a low chair.

"This is my own particular chair," said Sophie. "This is where I sit and do my thinking. Isn't it lovely?"

"Y—yes," answered Oliver, but without enthusiasm.

"Don't say 'yes' when you mean 'no.' Why don't you like it?"

"I don't like the dark."

"You're afraid of it, you mean?"

"No, I'm not afraid, but I don't like it."

"You're afraid to say you're afraid, and so you tell a lie. That's not pretty, Oliver. I hate lying."

Oliver's face went crimson and the tears sprang to his eyes. She stooped and kissed him.

"Don't cry," she said. "I needn't have been so fierce. If you want to lie, I don't know why you shouldn't, only I'd much rather you didn't lie to me."

Oliver looked up at her, and she thought she could feel rather than see that he gave a little

shiver as he said very gravely : “ Auntie says I shall go to hell if I tell lies.”

“ Pooh ! That’s like what they tell us in Noah’s Ark.”

This was Sophie’s irreverent name for the Seminary, and it brought a smile, as it was meant to.

“ If there *is* a hell,” she went on, “ I don’t suppose it’s half as bad as they make out. Look here, Oliver. When you stand outside, you think this place looks dark and dreadful. Now, then, you sit there, and I’ll show you something.”

She knelt down and drew from under her chair a long, flat box. Inside, were a bag of grapes and two plates.

“ There,” she said, giving him a plate with a big bunch of grapes, “ it isn’t such a bad place after all, is it ? ”

That afternoon lived long in Oliver’s memory. Indeed its mark upon his life was ineffaceable. For one thing his admiration of Sophie was straightway merged in a deeper, stronger feeling. She became his heroine, his ideal, almost his divinity. Babyish in many respects, in others he was very precocious. An attentive listener to the conversations between his father and Mrs. Bannock, and that good lady’s constant companion, his quick intelligence had accommodated itself only too easily to the grown-up attitude of mind. His toys were few in number, but large and costly, for Martin hated what he called “ rubbish.” The prize which he had



promised Oliver for his school successes proved to be an elaborate railway with a station and sidings and points and signals. It cost two or three pounds, but it was well worth it. Over it, for the first time, the father and the child began to draw together. Half-ashamed, Martin found himself ridiculously captivated by this toy, and as he put it together, and explained the details, and showed the working, the eager interest and excited pleasure of the boy touched him strangely. A new sense of proud proprietorship made him look upon the little lad with other eyes. The slight physique, the pretty face, the quickly flushing cheeks, he not only forgave him these, he actually began to count them to him for righteousness. "A thoroughbred, if ever there was one," he said to himself, and one evening amazed Mrs. Bannock, disconcerted the maid, and frightened Oliver by appearing uninvited at the ceremony of the evening bath.

"Goodness gracious, Martin, you quite startled me!" exclaimed Mrs. Bannock, "but we're very glad to see you, aren't we, Oliver?"

Martin made no answer, nor did Oliver, unless a furious blush could be interpreted as one. But the father watched the process gravely and silently, till the last of the soap had been wiped from the victim's eyes. Then he bent down and lifted the little white body in his arms, so that the child's face and his own were on a level. They looked for a moment in each other's eyes; then Martin pressed a hasty kiss on the

soft lips, set the child gently down, and, without a word, walked out of the room. The moment he was gone, Oliver burst into a passion of tears.

Just as the child found his father—or was found by him—he lost his friend. Sophie was suddenly spirited away to a school in Paris. She wrote to him once or twice, but her letters seemed not a bit like herself, and the deep impression she had made on him soon began to change if not to fade. He never spoke of her, but she was constantly in his thoughts, more and more as a strange, half-mystical being. In the holidays, Mrs. Bannock often took him out for walks with her, and he was wonderfully ingenious in finding excuses for passing through Hamilton Terrace. When they came to the house, he would lag behind and look up at the windows, always fancying that, by some happy chance, Sophie's face might appear, smiling at him. Mrs. Zanetti, a tall, elegant, somewhat languid lady, had been very kind to him and he had thought her surpassingly beautiful—far more so, indeed, than Sophie, though it was only as a piece of Sophie's furniture that he was interested in her. He tried hard to get a peep at the garden, for there, he knew, was that dark, mysterious, alarming, yet fascinating place of shadows and a chair. With all a child's strange reserve, and stranger tenacity of impression, he brooded over the memory of the moments he had spent there. Something big, he felt, had happened to him, though what it was, he had not the least idea. As a matter of fact it was nothing more than the

first, half-unconscious struggle between an old idea and a new: the first revolution, the first dethronement. Mrs. Bannock was, theologically, a cheerful Evangelical. Her cheerfulness did not prevent her from holding very severe views as to hell and eternal punishment. With a good deal of imaginative detail and the assistance of an old engraving, she had made the fire and reek and anguish a very real thing to the child, whose eager and excited questions drew forth ever new horrors. And then five minutes with Sophie in her garden had quenched all the fires. Now, when he thought of hell it was as a long, dark vault of moving, rustling shadows, terrible to see and enter, but at the very heart of it stood a tree covered with bunches of large, white, musky grapes, and a dark girl with laughing eyes, a girl who was never afraid.

Her fearlessness and her smile—these were the elements out of which he fashioned his first divinity.

## V

For two years longer, Oliver was a pupil at the Seminary. He was the only boy in the "Upper School," and his position was an anomalous one. During the last twelve months he enjoyed those special privileges which Dr. Arkwright had, almost from the first, been reserving for him. It was not without a good deal of address that the Doctor secured for him—and incidentally for himself—these advantages. Martin had not



been favourably impressed by the headmaster, and was inclined to send Oliver at once to a boys' school. Mrs. Bannock strongly opposed this suggestion, but it was not her efforts so much as the new-born tenderness of the father towards his son that vetoed it. Oliver himself was consulted, and begged quite piteously to stay at the Seminary. The danger was averted, but, through Mrs. Bannock, the Principals learnt of its existence, and laid their plans accordingly. From that time the reports of his progress became quite ecstatic. In music, drawing (including sepia), universal history, and English composition there was little room for improvement. But he had begun French, and Professor Kokermüller already pronounced him a most promising pupil. Still more gratifying was his remarkable progress in mathematics. He had already a firm grasp of the theory of numbers and only needed continued practice on the present lines to become an accomplished young arithmetician. "Euclid," the Doctor added, at the end of the report, "is not included in the ordinary curriculum, but I have once or twice kept our dear Oliver and commenced with him the study of the elementary geometrical concepts, and I have been both surprised and delighted at the quickness and intelligence with which he apprehended them. He is really quite ripe for a fuller study of this most *important* and *practical* subject."

The bait was swallowed, and six months afterwards another cast was made.

“A very satisfactory term,” the Doctor wrote, “steady progress, excellent, and in some directions brilliant work. I think the time has come when Oliver might begin the study of the Latin language, a knowledge of which will stand him in good stead whatever his future career. It is a branch of study outside our ordinary time-table, but the necessary arrangements can be made if desired.”

It pleased Martin to think that special arrangements would have to be made on Oliver's behalf, and next term's *Henry's First Latin Book* was added to the boy's library. For a reading book, a copy of *Anthon's Cæsar* was provided; also a grammar, and a Latin-English dictionary. This time, Dr. Arkwright was genuinely astonished at the boy's quickness. In fact, his progress was quite embarrassing. For—if the truth must be confessed—the Doctor had but a nodding acquaintance with what he often spoke of as “the classic tongues of Greece and Rome.” He was not, however, one of those instructors who teach only what they happen to know. There are such things as “Keys,” and with these in his hand Dr. Arkwright was ready to lead his pupil through almost any door in the temple of learning. One difficulty in the present case was that the Key was seven or eight years older than the edition of “Henry” which Oliver was using. In this edition some new sentences and exercises had been added, as to which the Key was silent. As a precautionary measure Dr. Arkwright had compared the two books,

and had underlined the new sentences. These, he told Oliver, he could leave out, as of no importance. Another and more obstinate difficulty was Oliver's occasional fits of curiosity. For weeks together he would go on, learning the forms, and translating the sentences, making terrific howlers, and rewriting them in accordance with the Doctor's emendations. Then, quite suddenly, he would let loose a whole spate of questions on his exasperated teacher. "Yes, but why?" was a formula that always disturbed, and—placid though he usually was—often irritated the learned man.

"Do the exercise, my dear boy, the correct way. My alterations will show you what that is. Do them over and over again, and it will become a second nature to you. While one boy is wasting his own and his teacher's time trying to find out *why* a thing is wrong, another and wiser boy has formed the habit of doing it right. If you had lived in Rome and had asked the illustrious Julius Cæsar or the infamous Nero (both of whom talked Latin, just as we talk English) the foolish questions you put to me, they, if they had spared your life (as to which I have my doubts), would have told you to go into the open street and practice talking the language till your ear told you when you were wrong. That is just what you are doing here. When you write out these sentences as I have corrected them, you are really talking Latin just as Julius Cæsar, or Nero, or any other educated Roman gentleman talked it. Let us have no more



why's, my dear Oliver, if you wish to grow up wise."

This was one—and perhaps the favourite—of the rare facetiæ which recurred at intervals in Dr. Arkwright's conversation, and, on his lips, it was more than a joke. It represented a good half of his philosophy of life.

## VI

When Oliver was ten years old, a cousin of the late Mr. Bannock returned from India, having retired from the Civil Service with a comfortable pension. He was an elderly bachelor, his savings were considerable, but his tastes, which inclined to the luxurious, were in conflict with his religious views, which favoured that austere sect known as "The Brethren." His abilities were above the average and as a young man he had passed his examination with distinction. His letter announcing his return to England was dated from the Golden Cross Hotel, Charing Cross. On a previous occasion, during Mr. Bannock's life, he had spent part of his leave with his cousin, and since then had kept up an irregular correspondence with the widow. He had been back in London some two or three months before he announced the fact and offered to call. Martin, who knew all about Mr. Henning's career and position, was, for him, quite cordial, and suggested evening dinner instead of an afternoon call.

It so happened that education was one of the visitor's great hobbies. Indeed, he had devoted much time and thought to evolving a new method of learning languages—the Positive-Perfect method, he had named it. The sight of a schoolboy was quite enough to set him off, and when he found that Oliver was learning French and Latin, he plied him with a score of questions, chiefly with regard to Dr. Arkwright, Professor Kokermüller, and their methods. After dinner, he asked the boy to bring him his books and exercises. Oliver blushed, looked uncomfortable, and turned appealingly to Mrs. Bannock, but Martin, in his "no nonsense" voice, told him to get the books at once. This would be a fine opportunity of discovering the truth about Dr. Arkwright and his establishment. In spite of Mr. Hetley, he still had his suspicions. For nearly an hour, Mr. Henning was busy with the boy and his books. Then Oliver was sent up to bed and his father looked towards the visitor for his verdict.

Mr. Henning, who was now thoroughly enjoying himself, assumed an air of judicial impartiality.

"On the whole," he said, "I should say the boy is unusually intelligent—no one could call him anything but promising. Yet in almost every subject in which I have tested him, he is terribly backward. The exception is French, in which he seems to have been quite well grounded in the old-fashioned grammatical way."

“What about his Latin?” asked Martin.  
“I’ve been paying for that as an extra.”

“I know nothing whatever, of course, about the school where your boy goes, but his Latin especially gives me the impression that the teaching must be very inefficient. In the last half-dozen exercises, for instance, which are supposed to have been corrected, there are quite a number of glaring errors, some of them repeated two or three times and allowed to stand. The difficulty had never been explained to the boy, who has been allowed, one might almost say encouraged, to fall into habits that would ruin his chances at any examination.”

The fact was, that as time went on, Dr. Arkwright had relaxed his vigilance, and had given up underlining the sentences not translated in his Key. He simply treated them as negligible quantities, and tacitly assumed that in these instances Julius Cæsar or Nero would have spoken exactly as Oliver had written.

Martin frowned heavily.

“Then he’s been swindling me,” he exclaimed.  
“I thought he was an old impostor when I saw him, but I’m not an educated man and I let myself be fooled by a black coat and a few long words. He’ll hear from me, will Dr. Arkwright.”

“Oh, Martin,” exclaimed Mrs. Bannock anxiously, “don’t do anything rashly! You know Mr. Hetley thinks a lot of the school.”

“They’re as thick as thieves, that’s true,” answered her brother, “and it’s exactly what they are, I expect.”



"But it may be someone else who teaches Latin," persisted Mrs. Bannock. "The school certainly bears a very good name. People like Mrs. Zanetti don't send their children to a place that doesn't."

Martin smiled.

"Ah, that girl—what's her name?—Sophie, wasn't it? She's got her head screwed on the right way. *She* knew what he was. 'Old Noah and his ark'; that was her name for Dr. Arkwright and his school. She'd seen through the old humbug."

"It certainly is Dr. Arkwright who teaches Oliver Latin," put in Mr. Henning. "I asked the question."

"Did you try his mathematics?" asked Martin.

"I did, indeed," answered Mr. Henning. "Arithmetic is not bad, in a very wooden, mechanical way. The boy knows the rules but not the reasons for them. Anything at all out of the beaten track is too much for him. As for the geometry, that was really farcical. He will have to begin again from the very beginning."

"That's another extra," Martin growled. "I'm much obliged to you, but I wish you had come a year or two ago. You seem to know a great deal about education. What would you do with the boy, if you were me?"

Mr. Henning was silent for a minute or two. Then he spoke.

"It really isn't easy to say. I should cer-

tainly take him away from Dr. Arkwright, but if you send him to a good school I'm afraid he would have a bad time at first. I'll think it over, and let you know."

While he was waiting for Mr. Henning's advice, Martin himself put the boy through his paces as far as he could. One evening he asked him to write a letter to him addressing the envelope. He was to ask for a shilling and to say what he would do with it. The letter was ingeniously expressed but badly written, and the spelling was worthy of the writing. Another night he set him some tests in arithmetic. The sums were much better done, but when asked what a fraction was, Oliver could give no better definition than "one number over another."

"Why do you 'carry'?" Martin asked, as the boy kept repeating the magic word.

"Because Dr. Arkwright tells us to," was the only answer forthcoming.

Mrs. Bannock trembled at these examinations, but Martin's changed attitude towards the boy was still maintained. He shook his head, and once or twice he exclaimed ruefully, "Oh dear, dear!" Beyond this he made no sign and spoke no word of remonstrance or reproach to the boy. But what he spared Oliver, all this and much more he reserved for Dr. Arkwright and the Seminary. Without waiting for Mr. Henning's promised advice, he took Oliver away, and wrote a letter so violent and abusive that Miss Barbara, who had plenty of spirit, urged her father to consult a solicitor with a view to an apology or

damages. The courage, however, that had faced the bull was no longer in evidence. Martin's coarse words were barbed with the truth, and easily they pierced the old man's pretentious but flimsy mail. He felt as though a storm-cloud had suddenly burst upon him, from which a merciless flash of light had in a moment revealed him to himself, for the first time, as he really was—a weak, foolish, ignorant, pompous, dishonest old man. He had not even the consolation of realising that there might be a worse state than his—an inner eye, stone-blind to the very lightning flash. But his family rallied round their idol and saw in his downcast eye and heavy step only the signs of a meekness almost superhuman.

## VII

Mr. Henning took his time, and it was a full fortnight before the promised advice was forthcoming. Then he wrote saying that, after many inquiries and a personal inspection, he had found what he believed would be the very school for Oliver. It was at Eastbourne, and the headmaster was an old college friend of his, the Rev. Lucius Lanyard, M.A. He was an excellent scholar and had been a distinguished athlete, in fact he was a running "blue," and he paid great attention to the physical as well as intellectual well-being of his pupils. "I took nothing on trust," Mr. Henning went on; "I stayed at



the house for two or three days, and a healthier, happier-looking set of boys I have never seen. Lanyard often takes Anglo-Indian boys, who are generally backward in their work, so that your lad would have an excellent chance of making up his leeway. Mrs. Lanyard is a remarkably accomplished woman; her music is quite brilliant, and before her marriage she had a teaching connection among some of the most exalted families in the kingdom. As a rule the school is full up, with a waiting list, but it so happens that a boy has been most unexpectedly sent for to join his father in the Straits Settlements, and Lanyard would, as a special personal favour to an old friend, let your boy slip into the vacancy. But he stipulated for an immediate reply, and—unless you consider the terms prohibitive—I should strongly advise you to accept the offer.”

The terms were high enough to make Mrs. Bannock gasp, and the sound helped her brother to make up his mind quickly.

“See after the boy’s clothes, will you, Alice?” he said at dinner that evening. “He’ll want cricketing flannels.”

“You mean him to go to Eastbourne then?” she asked.

“I wrote to your cousin this morning,” he answered.

So, almost before he knew what was happening, Oliver was whirled away to Eastbourne and the new school. The time at home after he was taken away from the Seminary had hung heavily

on his hands. Then had come the excitement of two days' feverish shopping which he had thoroughly enjoyed, and the good-bye to his father which, in a very different way, had also excited him. Mrs. Bannock herself always turned out the gas in his bedroom. About five minutes after her visit, Oliver heard his father's heavy step on the stairs, and his heart began to beat fast for no reason that he could explain to himself. The door opened and Martin appeared, carrying a candle, which he shaded with one hand and then placed on the chest of drawers at the other end of the room.

The moment the door opened, Oliver had turned his face to the wall, closed his eyes and pretended to be asleep. It was not in play but rather in deference to that strange sense of excitement.

“Are you asleep, Oliver?”

His father spoke in a low, anxious voice, and the boy turned round at once, his eyes wide open.

“No, father,” he answered.

Martin came up to the bed and sat down, awkwardly and precariously, on the extreme edge. He seemed in no hurry to begin, but he was never a fluent speaker, and Oliver was accustomed to his silences.

“You look red; are you too hot?” he asked at last.

“No, father,” answered the boy, holding out his hand as evidence.

Martin took it and felt the cool, soft skin.

“No,” he said, “that seems all right.”

After quite a long pause, during which he stroked the small hand, he started again abruptly.

“I have to go early to-morrow, so I shan’t see you before you start. I hope you’ll like your new school and do your best to get on well. It’ll cost a lot, sending you there. We must try to get our penn’orth for our penny.”

He spoke seriously, and the boy nodded gravely.

“Yes, father,” he answered, “I’ll do my best. But I’d much rather stop at home.”

“And I’d much rather you did. But the holidays will soon be here, and then you shall go to the Crystal Palace and the Polytechnic. And here’s something for you now, to take with you.”

He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out eight brand-new half-crowns. Even in that dim light they shone gloriously.

“All those for me?” exclaimed the boy, enraptured.

“Yes, all for you. But you must mind you don’t lose them. I hate to see people lose money. And don’t give or lend them to anyone else. That’s only another way of losing.”

“All right, I won’t forget. Will you please put them on the mantelpiece? No, not there—where I can see them.”

Martin did as he was asked, and then came back to his seat on the edge of the bed. He wanted something badly—very badly indeed—and he was a man who, when he wanted any-



thing, seldom found much difficulty in asking for it. But then, what he now desired was quite outside the range of his ordinary cravings.

“ Why don’t you want to go ? ” he asked.

“ It’ll all be so strange. Auntie says it will be splendid, but she’s never been there, and I don’t see how she can know. And I shall miss her dreadfully, and Kate too, and——”

“ Yes ? ” interrupted his father eagerly.

“ And Prue.”

Martin’s face fell. Mrs. Bannock, the housemaid, and the cat. Not a word, not a thought for his father. Only one way of stimulating affection occurred to him.

“ I’ll tell you what, Oliver,” he said. “ When you’ve been a fortnight at school you shall have a hamper—a real good one. Cake ; you like plenty of that, don’t you ? ”

Oliver nodded.

“ Yes, if it’s not full of those little seeds.”

“ All right. Rich, dark, currant and plum cake, with sugar on the top.”

“ That’s Christmas cake,” said Oliver, and awe was in his tone.

“ All right ; a big Christmas cake. What else do you like ? ”

The boy thought hard.

“ Sardines—and toffee—and mixed biscuits—and those fruits with sugar outside—and apples—and nuts.”

Martin took out his business notebook and carefully entered all the items.

“And figs,” piped the boy.

“And figs,” echoed his father, making the further entry, and closing the book. “Very well. You shall have the hamper——”

“If I do what?” asked Oliver, already familiar with the idea of contract and consideration.

Martin made no direct reply. He went back to the list that rankled.

“Aunt Alice, and Kate, and Prue,” he repeated. “Whom have you forgotten that doesn’t forget you?”

Oliver looked up, half-frightened at the intensity of his father’s tone.

“God,” he whispered.

Martin grunted, and an impatient little shake of the head showed his vexation. Oliver’s face flushed scarlet, and his eyes glistened with the ready tears.

“I know what you mean, father. It’s you. But I hadn’t forgotten you.”

His father looked steadily at him.

“Hadn’t you?” he asked.

Oliver’s eyes fell.

“No,” he said. “You’re my father.”

Martin’s face cleared as if by magic. He bent down and kissed the boy.

“That’s right, my boy,” he exclaimed. “Don’t forget me, and I won’t forget you. You’ll see that, when you get the hamper. Don’t look hang-dog. I believe you’re going to have the best time of your life, but if you don’t like the school, you shan’t stay. There’s a promise. I’m a man of my word, and you

must grow up to be the same. Now, then, give me a smile for good-bye."

In a moment the boy looked up with a radiant smile.

"Good-bye," he called, as the candle disappeared and the door closed.

Martin went downstairs smiling too.

"It's easy enough to cheer him up, after all," he said to himself. "He's as jolly as a sand-boy now."

Upstairs, Oliver sat up in bed listening till the sound of his father's feet died away. Then he slipped out of bed and opened the door wide enough to let a long streak of light from the landing show upon the wall. After which he crept back to bed.

Nearly an hour later, Kate the housemaid looked in, candle in hand, on her way to bed.

"Oh, Kate," came from the darkness a voice broken with tears, "is that you?"

"Why, Master Oliver, whatever are you crying for, and why was your door open?" asked the good-natured girl, going to the bedside and looking down at the tear-stained face.

"Take your hand away from the candle," he said. "You don't know how glad I was to hear you."

"Are you crying because of going away to-morrow? I thought you'd made up your mind to be brave."

"It isn't that at all."

"What is it then? Come, you don't mind telling me. I never tell tales, do I?"



“No, you don’t. I think I’ll tell you. Blow out the candle.”

She did so at once.

“I told a—an untruth, and I was afraid of the dark.”

“And now you’ve made me put you in the dark.”

“Ah, but it’s different when someone’s here, specially you. Do you ever tell them, Kate?”

“Lies? Yes, of course I do. Not more than I can help, though.”

“And what do you do when you’ve told them?”

“Stick to them like glue, and wash my mouth out.”

She could tell by his voice that he was smiling, as he asked her to give him a drop of water.

“Now give me a kiss, Kate,” he said. “You’re such a help to me. I don’t know what I shall do without you. I wonder what Sophie would have said. Good-night.”

## VIII

The Rev. Lucius Lanyard, M.A., was a very different man from poor old Dr. Arkwright. Only just under six feet in height, lean but muscular, he looked, and was, tremendously fit. At Oxford, “Lucy”—so he was known to his intimates—earned the reputation of being a sound scholar, a keen sportsman, and in character perfectly straight.

What he had been as a student, he now was as a schoolmaster, but his limitations had become more evident. The development that might naturally have been looked for had not come. Intellectually, he was still an undergraduate. He read little beyond school books and the papers—especially *The Sportsman* and *The Field*. He was a sound, moderately high churchman, and his religion was penetrated by a curious, and—even to those who knew him best—surprising, vein of emotionalism. More than once, in Lent, he had astonished and frightened a good many of his boys by breaking down almost hysterically during the Gospel lesson.

With this one exception, however, he seemed the incarnation of plain, practical common-sense joined to firm principle and tireless industry, an industry that seemed to find special enjoyment in spending itself on the smallest household details.

When Oliver and Mrs. Bannock reached Riverside, Mr. Lanyard happened to be out, and they were welcomed by Mrs. Lanyard. She was as tall for a woman as her husband for a man, but a good deal older looking. A slight air of languor only added a touch of distinction to her pleasant manners, and Oliver, who was very sensitive to the externals of appearance and demeanour, was immediately captivated. Mrs. Bannock was delighted with everything. They had been so fortunate in getting corner seats on the journey down. Eastbourne was a most charming place. What an air! She felt

quite braced up already. It would be the making of Oliver, she was quite sure. Sea air always did suit him.

“He looks just a little delicate,” said Mrs. Lanyard, smiling at him, though the remark was intended for Mrs. Bannock. Encouraged by the smile, Oliver answered for himself, with much gravity.

“It’s nothing organic, Dr. Prince said, didn’t he, Auntie ? ”

Both the ladies were startled.

“Little pitchers,” exclaimed Mrs. Bannock, looking at the schoolmaster’s wife. Then turning to the boy, she said :

“How did you know what ‘ organic ’ meant ? ”

“I looked it out in the Dictionary.”

“What did it say ? ”

“It meant ‘ vital, ’ ” he answered.

“And what does ‘ vital ’ mean ? ” Mrs. Lanyard inquired.

“I looked that out too. It means having to do with life.”

She looked at him still more attentively.

“Is this your first boarding-school ? ”

Mrs. Bannock answered for him.

“Yes,” she said. “It’s his first flutter out of the nest.”

Tea was brought in, very daintily served, and then Mrs. Lanyard said, “Now, shall I show you where the boys sleep ? ”

As she spoke she caught sight of the quick flush on Oliver’s cheek, and her heart misgave her. As they went up the wide stairs, she took



his hands in hers, and he looked up and smiled. "I'll manage it, somehow," she said to herself.

There were two dormitories. The smaller, on the first floor, took twelve boys. The larger, on the top floor, accommodated twenty. Besides these, there were two small rooms, one above, the other below. One was used as an isolation chamber in case of illness, the other was a bachelor's spare room. As they went into the first dormitory, Mrs. Lanyard felt the small fingers begin to work and twist round hers.

"Here," she said, opening another door, "is the bathroom where the boys wash. There's another one downstairs for that dormitory."

Again she felt the fingers wriggling as if they wanted to escape. She let them go, but on their way downstairs she stopped at the first-floor landing.

"This is the little spare room," she said. "One of the boys has just strained a tendon rather badly. I think I shall let him sleep in here for a week or two, and Oliver might share the room with him. Would you rather do that than go at once into the big room?" she asked him.

"Oh yes," he whispered, and Mrs. Bannock jumped at the suggestion.

"I'm afraid we've coddled him a bit," she said. "He's more like a girl than a boy."

"Well," answered Mrs. Lanyard, "Bertie Squires is a very good-natured boy and will look after Oliver at first."

"The house seems very quiet," said Mrs. Bannock.

“They’re all at the playing fields, except Bertie. He’s in the garden, resting his leg.”

When the time came for Mrs. Bannock to catch the return train, Oliver nearly broke down, but something in the face and voice of his new friend made a strong appeal to his self-control, and he managed to keep back the tears. Fortunately, at the most critical moment, when the farewell kisses were being exchanged, the thought of the hamper came into his mind and comforted him.

“That’s a brave boy, Oliver,” said Mrs. Lanyard, “we’ll soon make a man of you. I’ll take you into the garden and introduce you and Bertie to each other.”

They found the invalid lying in a low hammock, repeating something to himself from a book. He was a fat, white-faced boy with small, bright eyes and very straight black hair.

“This is a new boy, Bertie,” Mrs. Lanyard explained. “I’m going to put you and him in the small bedroom next to Dormitory B. You must tell him all about things, and be his guardian angel till he’s found his feet.”

She evidently knew the boy pretty well, for he smiled and answered :

“Just as I’ve lost one of mine. Well, I’m good enough for the part, but I’m too fat. My wings would be always letting me down.”

The answer was evidently addressed to her, but half way through he turned and stared solemnly at Oliver, who felt himself addressed, and answered with a question :

“ *Have* they let you down ? Is that how you hurt yourself ? ”

Bertie continued to stare at him with intense gravity.

“ Oh lor ! ” he said at last. “ Are you a wag ? What a sad affliction for your dear father and mother.”

“ Oliver hasn’t a mother,” said Mrs. Lanyard quietly.

Bertie’s white face flushed a vivid red, and the whole expression of his face changed.

“ I’m awfully sorry,” he said, “ but it’s just like me. My tongue’s always falling over itself.”

“ And you think one wag in a school is enough, I suppose,” said Mrs. Lanyard. “ What were you repeating just now ? ”

Bertie held up a little book.

“ It’s a thing Mr. Buckler gave us to learn,” he said. “ It ends up fine.”

“ Was that what you were saying aloud ? ” she asked.

“ Yes,” he replied, and without any invitation began :

“ One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,  
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals,  
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.”

He recited it admirably, and Mrs. Lanyard gave an approving nod.

“ I’m glad you like Wordsworth. He’s one of my great favourites,” she said. “ Now I must go back to the house and leave you to find each other out.”



As soon as they were left alone, Bertie said,  
“Are you fond of natural history?”

“I don’t know much about it,” answered Oliver.

“Do you like tiger fights?”

“I’ve never seen one.”

Close to the hammock was a large syringa bush. Bertie produced a short stick and pointed to a web in the middle of which a big spider kept watch with legs at attention.

“That’s Tiger,” he said, “and he’s worth any other two in the garden. Look here, you take this stick and fetch any other spider you fancy. We’ll introduce him to Tiger and watch them shake hands. Cut along!”

This last injunction was added rather sharply, and Oliver, who had hesitated, took the stick and walked a few paces along the border. He was puzzled at his own feelings. He had often made spiders fight in the garden at home, and had especially enjoyed intervening at the decisive moment—snatching victory from the mandibles of the conqueror and letting the vanquished escape. But now, the presence of this sharp-eyed boy seemed to make all the difference. The thing looked mean, cruel, wicked. Yet he felt himself helpless. For the first time in his life he was left alone to his own resources. His one hope lay in this boy who appeared quite ready to be friendly. Whatever happened, he must not be offended.

“Now then, kid, look sharp!”

This time the tone, as well as the words, was

a good deal more peremptory, and at the same moment Oliver saw a fat spider in the middle of a huge web. In a moment, he had hooked him with the stick and came back carefully to the hammock.

“Golly! That’s a whopper,” exclaimed the invalid. “Sling him into Tiger’s parlour.”

Deftly, notwithstanding the distaste for the whole proceeding, that grew stronger every moment, Oliver did as he was told, and in another moment the battle was in full progress.

It did not last long. The invader was more active and more aggressive. In the middle of a desperate, whirling struggle, Tiger suddenly let fall a thread, fell precipitately and, in spite of the enemy’s frantic haulage, disappeared from sight.

“Great Jericho!” exclaimed Bertie, sinking back into his hammock. “Who’d have thought it possible?”

He looked so crestfallen that Oliver could not help smiling. He felt relieved at Tiger’s escape. The other boy flashed round upon him in a moment.

“Yes, grin away, you coarse-minded little beast,” he burst out. “It’s nothing to you, is it, that a great reputation is smashed and the school’s chief favourite driven away and probably killed by your loathsome and disgusting cruelty? Well, you wait and see what Lucifer says when he comes out to look for his pet. He brought him with him from Cambridge, and he feeds him every morning and night—a bluebottle

at 6.30 A.M. and a daddy-long-legs at 8 P.M. sharp. He'll be half out of his mind when he hears what you've done."

Oliver felt sure this must be a joke, but the boy spoke with such tremendous energy and earnestness that he couldn't help fearing there might be some foundation of truth, and his voice wavered as he protested.

"But you told me to do it—you told me twice."

"I thought so," said Bertie, turning his back and picking up the book again. "I always know a sneak at first sight."

Words of indignant protest trembled on Oliver's lips, but this strange boy's coolness and readiness of speech, and familiarity with all the mysteries of school life, daunted him. He waited opposite the hammock for five minutes or so, then moved away and walked along the path feeling utterly miserable in his loneliness. One thought comforted him; he would write to his father the very first chance he got, and ask to be taken away from this dreadful place. But in the meanwhile, what would happen when Lucifer—that was Mr. Lanyard, he supposed—came back? Of course, Bertie had been telling a lot of rubbish, but it did sound as if Lucifer was a man to be feared. And then there were the boys—and the night in the bedroom with Bertie.

He was still in the depths when he heard the voice from the hammock.

"I say, you new boy, just listen to this—isn't



it fine?—It's about a Highland girl singing to herself as she reaps—listen :

“A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.”

Oliver had run back in time to hear the lines.

“Yes,” he said, “it is fine.”

“So's the other,” said Bertie.

“Never to blend our pleasure or our pride  
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.”

Oliver thought of Tiger, but was prudent enough to hold his tongue, and the other boy went on :

“Have you ever seen Wordsworth's tomb ? ”

“No,” said Oliver.

“I have. It's up in the Lakes. It's solid gold, and the letters in ivory ; ivory and gold, like that house somebody built in the Bible—Lucifer was jawing about it yesterday. And there's a long inscription—all about his birth and death, and a list of all his poems, and underneath there are two lines :

“Here lies the body of W. W.  
Who never more will trouble you, trouble you.”

“Beautiful, isn't it ? ”

Oliver looked hard at him, but his face was intensely grave, and the new boy stammered out :

“I—don't think I do like it very much.”

“ I’m surprised at you, new boy. Do you say your prayers every night at mummy’s knee ?”

Oliver went crimson, and Bertie jumped up.

“ Oh,” he cried, “ I clean forgot. That was below the belt. I’m sorry. You say them as much as ever you like. I’ve given up saying them myself, because I tried getting out of a swishing that way, and it didn’t come off—but the swishing did. Still, I’ve got what Lucifer calls an open mind, and you can do just as you please.”

“ Thank you,” said Oliver, bewildered but grateful.

“ Now I’ll tell you a thing or two, before they come back. Lucifer isn’t a bad sort if you’re his sort. His sort are the big, strapping boys who like cold baths—ugh!—and feel their muscles, and know all about records, and aren’t too brainy. He’s quite mad on truthfulness, and the honour of an English schoolboy, and public spirit, and things like that, and when he’s fairly on the war-path he takes a lot of managing. Buckler—he’s second in command—plays with a very straight bat, and is a good slow bowler, and knows a bit about mathematics. Frobisher swims like a porpoise and looks something like one too. He likes ducking new boys and then saving their lives, and he can’t make out why they’re not grateful. Then there’s Mrs. Lanyard—well, you’ve seen her. She’s the Redeeming Feature, with capitals. When she plays the piano, you feel as if you didn’t want the holidays to come. Hullo ! here they are.”

## IX

Oliver looked round quickly, and saw a little crowd of boys in flannels, two or three of them in advance of the others, kicking a football. Behind was a tall, lean man, also in flannels, and, talking to him, a fat man, a good deal shorter, in ordinary tweeds.

Oliver guessed at once, and quite rightly, that the tall man was Mr. Lanyard, and the other, Mr. Frobisher.

Two or three of the boys came round the hammock, talking to Bertie and looking curiously at the new arrival, who felt desperately shy. Just as Mr. Lanyard caught sight of him, Mrs. Lanyard came down the steps from the garden verandah and joined the group.

“They’d better go in and change at once, hadn’t they?” she said to her husband; and then, beckoning to Oliver, she added: “This is Oliver Grimwood, my dear—you remember; the boy Mr. Henning is interested in.”

Mr. Lanyard looked steadily at his new pupil and his eyebrows lifted perceptibly.

“Well, Oliver,” he said, as he shook hands with him, “I hope we shall be good friends. Is this your first boarding-school?”

He spoke in a loud, clear voice which made Oliver’s “Yes, sir” sound a poor mumble.

“I dare say, then, you’ll feel a bit strange at first, but the experience will teach you to be



strong and self-reliant, and that's a lesson worth paying for—eh ? ”

It was, as Oliver soon found out, a peculiarity of Mr. Lanyard's conversation that he often paused at the end of a sentence and finished with a sharp interrogative “ eh ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” Oliver repeated.

“ Do you play cricket and football ? ”

“ A little, sir,” he answered, but did not mention that it had been with the girls in Dr. Arkwright's garden.

Mr. Lanyard turned to his assistant master.

“ He's not badly put together, is he ? I've known boys like that turn out very smart at games.”

Mr. Frobisher turned a smiling face on the boy, but Oliver remembered the duckings and mistrusted the smile.

“ Can you swim ? ” asked the master.

Oliver had read a description of the stroke and it sounded quite easy.

“ I know how to,” he answered, “ but I'm not sure whether I can do it.”

They all laughed at this, and Mr. Frobisher said :

“ I must take you down with me to the sea and you can try.”

Oliver trembled, but Mr. Lanyard said :

“ No, no ; it's too late in the season for a boy to start. You must wait, Oliver, till the spring.”

And Oliver breathed freely again.

“ Now we'll go in to tea,” said Mr. Lanyard, and led the way into a large room where the

boys—between thirty and forty of them—were already seated at two long tables. He found an empty chair for Oliver, and told him to make friends with the other boys. Then he went out, and Mr. Frobisher took the chair at the head of one table and a strange master whom Oliver supposed to be Mr. Buckler came to his table. This master stood up and said a grace, after which the boys fell to on huge stacks of bread and butter, and bread and marmalade, and big glasses of milk. Oliver's tea in the drawing-room had been a very ladylike performance and he was glad to make a substantial meal. The boys round him were so busily occupied that there was not much conversation, but when he took a second slice of bread his right-hand neighbour said with a grin :

“ Did they starve you in prison ? ”

And another boy opposite called out :

“ 'Twasn't prison ; it was an asylum, wasn't it, new boy ? ”

They both looked quite friendly, and Oliver smiled and said :

“ No, it was in the train.”

“ Oh,” exclaimed the boy opposite, “ you've been training, have you ? ”

“ Oh shut up, Chips, do ; your puns would make a goat sick.”

It was the boy on Oliver's right who spoke. He was a round-headed, jolly-looking boy, with very curly brown hair and twinkling eyes. He turned to Oliver.

“ What are you good at ? ”

Oliver hesitated and felt himself going very red.

"I can play the piano pretty well," he said, almost in a whisper.

"Can you really?" interposed the boy they called Chips. His real name was Wood. He evidently had quick ears. "Which do you like best—plain sewing or crochet?"

"I can't do either."

"Oh dear, that's bad. Every new boy has got to hem a handkerchief for Mr. Lanyard, or crochet an antimacassar for Mrs. Lanyard."

"Which did you do, Wood?" inquired Mr. Buckler, suddenly and most unexpectedly joining in the conversation.

For a moment Chips looked disconcerted. Then he rallied.

"Please, sir, it's so long ago that I've forgotten," he answered.

As soon as tea was over, Mr. Buckler touched Oliver on the shoulder.

"Come with me," he said. "Mr. Lanyard wants you in his room."

The Headmaster's room was on the ground floor, a good-sized, comfortably furnished room, in which Oliver found Mr. Lanyard and a small, dark, well-groomed man whom he soon discovered to be the school doctor.

"This is Dr. Filliter," said Mr. Lanyard. "He's going to weigh you and measure you and examine you, and six months hence he'll do it again, if all's well, and then we can see whether Eastbourne agrees with you—eh?"



So Oliver had to strip, and stand on a big weighing machine, and have a tape passed round various parts of his insignificant anatomy, and be tapped and prodded and stethoscoped.

“Not much to boast about at present,” said the doctor when all was over, and Oliver with red cheeks and eyes suspiciously bright was buttoning up his clothes.

The whole proceeding had reminded him of being measured at the tailor’s, for Mr. Lanyard had been entering the figures as the doctor announced them.

“Ah well, there’s all the more room for improvement,” was the Headmaster’s consolation.

As soon as the doctor had gone, Oliver was submitted to a further examination, this time as to his scholastic acquirements. The result was, if possible, still less satisfactory.

“You’ve got a lot of leeway to make up, young man,” Mr. Lanyard said, looking not unkindly at the boy, “but you’re sound in wind and limb, and you don’t look a fool. I’ll tell you what you do look—you look too much of a girl. You’ve got to grow up a man, you know. That means having a big chest, and plenty of muscle, and a good, clear brain, with a lot that’s worth learning stored up in it. And you must learn to be plucky and hold your own. You must never go to the masters or to me with tales about the other boys. And you must always tell the truth. I can put up with a lot of mischief, but when I hear a lie, I stamp on it.”

As he spoke, he gave a vigorous stamp with

his foot, and Oliver gave an involuntary jump back. Mr. Lanyard laughed.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he said. "I'm sure you've been too well brought up to lie, but I tell every boy what I'm telling you."

That night Oliver went to bed half-dazed with his new experiences. Bertie was very friendly and, either by luck or by tact, put Oliver almost at his ease by getting him to help in the process of undressing, which, with his lame leg, was somewhat difficult.

"You'll be a doctor I can see," he said. "The other chaps half pull my boot off. Let's see—what's your name?"

"Oliver Grimwood."

"My name's Squires, so they call me Knight. I wonder what they'll call you. If I were christening you I should call you 'Blusher.' What do you do it for? There you go."

"I can't help it. I hate doing it, but it's no good. As soon as I begin to think about it, I feel hot. I wish I could do something to stop it."

"Do what I did about the swishing. It might work with you. Good-night. Don't forget to say them."

## X

As time went on, Oliver settled down to acquiescence in, if not enjoyment of, school life. During the first few weeks he suffered acutely.

His shyness, his blushes, his timidity, all combined to make him the butt of his less sensitive companions. If it had not been for Bertie Squires, his difficulties would have been far more formidable. But the friendship begun under such quaint conditions proved a sturdy plant, and as "Knight" was one of the most popular boys in the school, his countenance made a great difference to Oliver. The difficulties were not so much with the work. Both Mr. Frobisher and Mr. Lanyard himself soon found that the newcomer was unusually bright. But nothing could induce him to throw himself with any ardour into the school games. In his early football practices he showed quite a good turn of speed for a small boy and—with a little luck perhaps—made quite a good show. Mr. Lanyard was very pleased and declared that he had, from the first, seen possibilities which he now felt sure would be realised. All these fair prospects, however, were clouded by a vigorous tackle and a heavy fall. The injured hero was led off the field weeping copiously, and from that time not only lost all his pleasure in the game, but obviously lost all his nerve too. Mr. Lanyard was unusually patient with him and tried encouragement, mild ridicule, and—these failing—a certain amount of compulsion. The only result was that the boy became hysterical, and half-amused, half-frightened his dormitory by walking and talking in his sleep. Dr. Filliter shook his head over these vagaries, but declared that force was no remedy. The only



thing to be done was to let him, as far as possible, go his own way. He would probably in time outgrow his nervousness.

With Mrs. Lanyard he was a great favourite. He was the only boy in the school whom she felt it a real pleasure to teach. The delicacy of his touch and his evident delight in good music attracted her, while his admiration of her playing, and his winning manners, as soon as he felt at ease with her, made a strong appeal. She tried to brace him for the rough-and-tumble of school life, and she felt sure that he really did try. But the months and the terms passed by, and he was still an exotic, planted side by side with a crowd of sturdy English seedlings.

Still, in many ways he thrived. The keen sea air gave him a fine, healthy appetite. With much tribulation he learned to swim, and, strange to say, developed into an expert swimmer, quite fast over short distances. This exercise invigorated and tanned him, so that when he came back to Avenue Road for his second summer holidays, Mr. Grimwood was delighted beyond measure, and asked Mr. Henning to dinner on purpose to thank him for his commendation. At the proud father's request, Oliver underwent a second examination, this time with much more satisfactory results.

"Mr. Lanyard, of course, teaches languages on the old, orthodox plan, which I think can be easily improved upon, but, allowing for this, your boy has really made excellent progress. His work in mathematics, too, is quite good."

This was Mr. Henning's verdict, and it strengthened Martin's feeling that, this time at any rate, he had made no mistake.

## XI

Another year at Eastbourne brought still better results, for Oliver came back with his class prize in Latin, a special prize for French, and a small silver cup for winning a swimming handicap. Now indeed he became at home not merely a favourite, but a hero. He was growing fast and, though still slight and slim, had lost the appearance of extreme delicacy, or rather of fragility, which had made him such an appealing figure as a small boy. Though he was nearing that difficult time of life when a boy is apt to be a severe trial even to his closest relations, he showed no traces of the hobbledehoy. There was nothing of the rough schoolboy in his manners. Kate and the other servants—there were three now—adored him. Mrs. Bannock thought him absolutely perfect, and Martin Grimwood himself, though he pretended to laugh at the women's nonsense, felt that with the boy the sun came into the house. Often at meals he would sit silent, his eyes, under their heavy, bushy brows, fastened upon the lad, a little smile lurking round the corners of his hard, straight mouth. Sometimes the smile would vanish, and a strange, abstracted expression would make his face almost unrecognizable. A gleam of the boy's

eye, an inflexion of his voice, some little gesture or trick of manner, had recalled the dead wife and mother, still remembered with a grief that was half anger against the fate that had snatched her from his strong, tenacious grasp. As the grief had been half anger, so the affection he felt for the boy was half exultation. Beaten to the ground for a time, victory was to be his after all.

Meanwhile the boy was in a fair way to be spoiled. Even at school his sweet temper and his generosity made him a favourite, in spite of his poor show at games and athletics. To Mr. Lanyard, indeed, he was always something of an eyesore. He was too unlike the normal, healthy schoolboy. "The boy's a funk," he said in one of the many discussions he held with his wife, "a funk to the backbone, and you never know where to have a coward. Oh yes, I know he's got a good complexion and a soft voice and—thanks to you, my dear—plays the piano very prettily, but that's not what I want. I want a real sturdy, high-spirited, straightforward English boy."

In answer to all this, Mrs. Lanyard could only say that Oliver was a dear, and that one day Mr. Lanyard would recognise his merits. At the first statement, he just lifted his eyebrows; at the second, he vigorously shook his head.

The next year was to be Oliver's last at Eastbourne. Mr. Henning advised that he should go to Shrewsbury, and Mr. Lanyard thought he would have quite a good chance for an entrance



scholarship. Martin hesitated, though Oliver was eager to go. He had, as yet, no definite plan in his mind for the boy's future, except that he meant him to be rich and prosperous. Of learning, literature, scholarship, he had a very poor opinion. The professions he thought overstocked and—with the exceptions of his own doctor and lawyer—underpaid. A business career was the best, and, with the start he could give his boy, a seat in the House might follow in good time.

On the other hand, he had a great respect for Mr. Henning and his views. That gentleman strongly urged the advantages of a liberal education. To have passed through a public school and one of the great universities gave a man, he declared, a position otherwise unattainable. Finally a compromise was reached. This year, it happened, the father of a former pupil who had been brilliantly successful at Oxford offered a special prize of £30 for two years, as a leaving exhibition for a boy going on to a public school. The prize, called, after the giver, the "Dempsey," was to be awarded on the results of a special examination to be held at the end of the Easter term. Mr. Henning suggested that if Oliver won this, he should try for a Shrewsbury scholarship; that if not, he should stay on for a year or two, and then enter business life. To this suggestion Martin agreed with very little demur.

So Oliver went back at the beginning of the Easter term with a firm resolve to do his very best to win the Dempsey.

His chief rival, and also his best friend, was Bertie Squires. This erratic youth was some six months older than Oliver and, like him, was in Mr. Lanyard's black books. The truth was, Bertie had well earned the reputation of being an incorrigible slacker. He had, he proudly declared, a very logical mind, and would have driven poor Dr. Arkwright to distraction by the frequency and audacity of his why's. A strong, healthy boy, he had considerable aptitude for games, but as soon as he felt tired, he—automatically, it seemed—ceased to exert himself.

“Why should I go on?” he asked. “Games are played, partly for pleasure, partly for health. When you're fagged, the pleasure's gone, and Nature says—rest. Who am I to disobey her?”

“What about public spirit?” asked the indignant Carter, captain of cricket, and a boy after Mr. Lanyard's own heart. “You don't play for your own beastly self. You play for your side?”

“Yes, I know,” answered Bertie with patient good-humour, “I've heard that drivel a good many times. It's a good joke and that's about the best that can be said for it. Say there are fifteen on the side. At half-time, two of us are done, and thirteen are fit to go on. Why should the thirteen expect us to sacrifice our health and our pleasure in order to give them a little selfish gratification? If we do, what's the result? The side is then made up of thirteen selfish beasts and two victims of their selfishness.

A very gratifying result, isn't it? What Lucifer calls 'the ethics of the playing-fields,' I suppose."

He admitted, however, that occasions might arise when it would be worth while to suffer considerable temporary inconvenience for a definite object, and the Dempsey examination, he held, was such an occasion.

"You'll do me easy at classics," he said to Oliver, "but I shall lose you at maths., and if there's any science, you won't see the way I go. At French there isn't much in it, but what there is, lies on your side. If there's an essay, it all depends on the subject. On the whole, it's a shade of odds on you, but I want the money more than you do, and I'm out to get it if I can."

This really was a very fair summary of the position. By this time, Oliver, having tasted the sweets of prize winning and the praise that followed it, had become very keen. He knew that every success was very sweet to his father, and he liked to see the face that was so often grim to others light up with a very different expression when it was turned towards him. Besides, he was anxious to go to Shrewsbury, and afterwards perhaps to Oxford. Even now he was a little afraid of a new, big school, but the thought of how he had settled down at Eastbourne and risen almost to the top, reassured him, and the stories of the good times that awaited him were constantly in his mind. As for the money, the only importance he attached to it was that he felt pretty sure of a handsome tip out of it if he proved successful. Nor did it



occur to him that winning or losing the £30 could make any real difference to his friend Bertie.

## XII

The examination for the Dempsey was to take place on May the 8th, and there was no little excitement in the school over the result. Bertie was the general favourite, though a good many pinned their faith to Carter, the football and cricket captain. Among them was Mr. Lan-yard himself.

“ I hope he gets it,” he said to his wife. “ He’s just the type I like to see doing well. He’ll get his blue some day, or I’m a Dutchman.”

“ I dare say he will,” she answered, “ but he won’t get the Dempsey unless the examiners are Dutchmen.”

“ I don’t know so much about that. He’s not so good as Squire at maths., and he’s a bit behind Grimwood at classics, but his marks may add up as high as theirs, for all that.”

“ I wish music counted,” she said.

He laughed.

“ As I wish bowling did—eh ? ”

Meanwhile the three boys finished their preparation in characteristic fashion. Carter plodded along steadily, spending more time than he usually did on his work, but not neglecting the weightier matters of the cricket field. Bertie worked—to use his own language—“ like a converted demon,” while Oliver made a collec-

tion of all his difficulties and weak points, especially in mathematics, and carried them to Mr. Buckler and Mr. Frobisher. He felt pretty sure of his Latin and Greek. His science was hopeless, but if he could do decent papers in maths. it might make all the difference between success and failure. There were several nice questions that he was keeping for the French master, but unluckily M. Portal was inconsiderate enough to catch a very severe cold. Then Oliver suddenly remembered Mr. Henning, who had, more than once, offered to help him with his French in the holidays. He made a list of his difficulties, wrote a polite little note, and sent his letter to Mrs. Bannock to be forwarded.

This was on Tuesday, and on Friday afternoon Mr. Lanyard called him into his room. The Headmaster was in flannels.

“ I’m just going out to the nets,” he said, “ but I want to give you a note that’s been sent for you.”

As he spoke, he took an envelope from the table and gave it to Oliver.

“ It’s from Mr. Henning ; you know him, don’t you ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, sir,” Oliver replied.

“ You might just put those books back in the bookcase,” Mr. Lanyard called out as he went into the hall and down the steps to the garden.

Left alone in the room, Oliver opened the envelope which, he was somewhat surprised to see, was neither addressed nor fastened.

Inside was a large sheet of paper folded square. As he opened it, the heading caught his eye—

“Dempsey Prize—Latin and Greek.” This was one of the examination papers. A glance at it, and he could be sure of nearly full marks.

He thought he heard a step. Instantly he folded the sheet and pushed it hastily back into the envelope. As he did so, he felt a glow of satisfaction. He had done the honourable thing. He would leave the envelope on the table and tell Mr. Lanyard. He put it down on the blotting-pad. Then he saw that there was another envelope exactly like the one he had just laid down, except that it was addressed in Mr. Henning’s writing, “Master Oliver Grimwood.” Evidently Mr. Lanyard had given him the wrong envelope by mistake. The best thing to do would be to take his own, leave the other, and say nothing about it. If he said anything, Mr. Lanyard would probably suspect him—Oliver knew quite well that his master did not trust him. He walked slowly to the door, taking out his letter. It was quite short :

“DEAR OLIVER,—I return your list of difficulties, which of itself shows that you have made very considerable progress. I would gladly have given you what help I could, but, as it happens, I am one of the examiners for the Dempsey Prize, and I don’t think it would be ‘the thing’ for me to coach a competitor even in another subject. But I think I may say that I very much hope you will do yourself the fullest justice.—Yours faithfully,

“HENRY HENNING.”



Oliver put Mr. Henning's letter in his pocket and walked out of the room into the hall. All the doors were open—Mr. Lanyard was fanatical about ventilation—and there was not a sign of anyone. Mr. Frobisher had taken a number of the boys to bathe, and the rest would be in the cricket field: it was only by special leave that he was free to stop in and work. As he stood there, the thought of the paper lying in its envelope, so easily accessible, assailed him. He was a very inquisitive boy, and both Mrs. Bannock and Kate had made him the depository of a good many secrets. A secret, indeed, had a powerful attraction for him. Even when he was quite a small boy he would sit quietly while his elders were talking, he apparently absorbed in a book or with a toy, but really taking in all that was being said. A letter left lying about drew him like a magnet. The secret, the mysterious, the forbidden, he had found by experience that there was nothing so interesting as these. The parts of the Bible that Mrs. Bannock had told him, with a shake of the head and just the faintest suggestion of a smile—which he instantly noted—were “not for little boys to read,” he had pored over till he knew them better than the parables or the sermon on the mount. By the aid of the Dictionary and a big old Universal Encyclopædia in Martin's study, he solved almost all the difficulties these passages presented, and those who knew him best would have been amazed and appalled at the nature and extent of his information.

It was not then—in the first instance, at any rate—so much the fact that his chance of winning the Dempsey would be bettered that drew him slowly back to Mr. Lanyard's table. It was rather the intense desire to see what was inside the envelope. Only a glance, he told himself; not enough to help him in the exam., but just enough to give him an idea what it was like. Still he hesitated, but the absolute silence reassured him. He walked quickly to the table and in a moment had the paper out. It was indeed only a glance he gave, for a foot crunched on the gravel outside, and in an instant he had replaced the sheet in its envelope and darted upstairs. On the landing he paused and looked down warily. He saw Mrs. Lanyard come through the hall and go into the drawing-room. He went into a room that was generally called the Library, where the elder boys were allowed to prepare their work, and sat down at the table. It was an amazing thing how much that glance had told him. There was that bit of Virgil about Orpheus and Eurydice—he knew that almost by heart. The Greek translation was prose—Xenophon he thought. There was very little accident—he had meant to go over that—but there was a question, with examples, on the *oratio obliqua* and another on the Homeric dialect. On the whole, it would be a fine paper for him.

Already he was horribly ashamed of himself and ashamed of his terror-stricken flight. His heart was still thumping and his forehead damp.

What was he to do? It would be impossible to spend the time he had intended, on what he now knew would be perfectly useless work. On the other hand, he would almost certainly have looked up the Homeric dialect; should he do so, now? What would Mr. Lanyard say if he knew? He had seen him in eruption more than once, and he could easily picture the scene. But Mrs. Lanyard and Bertie—the thought of their surprise and disappointment and indignation was still more intolerable. Oh what a fool he had been! Yes, a fool, and something a good deal worse. And what *was* he to do? His first idea was to give up trying for the prize. But he must find some excuse. His health? As a small boy at home, he had, more than once, found it convenient to invent a headache, and on one occasion he had distinctly got the better of the doctor, who had gravely prescribed for ills that were—and Oliver knew them to be—purely imaginary. Unfortunately, his health had of late been almost robust. On the other hand, he felt sure that a week or two's worrying over this wretched affair would soon make any story of ill-health look plausible enough. But then there was his father. Though not particularly anxious to send him to Shrewsbury, he would be delighted if Oliver won the Dempsey, and sadly disappointed if he did not go in. And the very fact that he felt sure his father would utter no word of reproach, made the boy all the more anxious to please him.

That particular evening, Bertie seemed to



have the Dempsey on the brain, for he could talk of nothing else. Oliver's answers grew shorter and shorter.

"Cheer up, old man," said Bertie, at last noticing the change, "and don't be shirty. This day fortnight, when Lucifer tells us the result, you will be congratulating me and trying to look as if you meant it."

"Oh shut up, for goodness' sake," exclaimed Oliver, "I've got some work to do, if you haven't."

"As far as that goes, there's a good lot I ought to be doing," answered Bertie. "I'm sorry to take this little Dempsey affair out of your hands, but my people aren't what you might call millionaires, and my orders are to annex it if I possibly can. If you do me out of it, there'll be wailing and gnashing of teeth at home."

In spite of the jesting words, Oliver felt, beneath them, a note of resolution, and he thought, with fresh dismay and disgust, of the thing he had done. It was too late now to try and undo it. Evidently, Mr. Lanyard was quite unconscious of the mistake he had made. More than once, Oliver almost made up his mind to go to him and tell him exactly what had happened. But he knew what an avalanche of questions would be let loose at once. He would have either to tell open, flagrant lies or to admit that he had taken a second look, and then he trembled and turned sick as he pictured the explosion of blustering anger that would follow. No ; it was impossible to face that.

What then was the alternative? Over this problem he pored intently, continuously, desperately. Yet, weak as he was in some ways, in others he had a strange, abnormal strength. In class, in the dormitory, with Mrs. Lanyard, even with Bertie, he managed to mask his pre-occupation. Mrs. Lanyard, indeed, felt rather than saw that something was amiss.

"I can see Schumann is not one of the subjects for the Dempsey prize," she said, as he finished the *Schlummerlied*.

"I felt I was playing it badly," he answered gravely. "Shall I go over it again?"

"No," she said. "See if you can get a dip in the sea with Mr. Frobisher this afternoon. Don't worry about the examination. I'm sure you've been overdoing it. The less you work, the better you'll do, now."

He smiled and shook his head.

"I'm awful in maths.," he explained. "If I don't grind at that, I shan't be able to do a question."

As he spoke, it flashed into his mind that here was the solution of his problem. He would do just what he said—work hard at maths. and look up a few points in science and French.

But the fates seemed to be against him, or perhaps too zealously in his favour. The next morning Mr. Frobisher said to the sixth form, "The boys who are going in for the Dempsey prize will stop behind for a few minutes. There are one or two things I want to recapitulate with them." He tested their accidence. Then he

gave them a few test sentences to turn into Latin. Carter boggled over an oratio-obliqua example, whereupon Mr. Frobisher went through the rules carefully.

“Silly old porpoise!” exclaimed the ungrateful Bertie, as soon as they were released. “Now we know what we shan’t get. I’ll have a look at some of the things he didn’t mention.”

By the morning of the 8th of May, Oliver was looking quite ill. He had lain awake half the night and had even gone so far as to pray fervently that something might have happened to the paper he had looked at, and that another might have been set. That was the only satisfactory way out that he could think of, and amid all his genuine unhappiness it did occur to him that it was a rather ingenious suggestion.

Fate, however, or Providence, declined to adopt it, and the very first paper was the one with which he was so odiously familiar. It seemed to him that he knew every single question, and that the answers to half of them had been coming in the last week’s lessons. He had, indeed, kept from directly looking them up, in text-books and grammars, but they had seemed to leap at him from every lesson-book he opened. Even when this was not the case, his mind had been busy, even against his will, recalling every peculiarity of that detestable Homeric dialect. It was a great relief when he found that not more than eight questions out of the twelve were to be attempted. He knew that he could get full marks for the oratio-obliqua question, and nearly



full marks for the Homeric dialect, but he left them untouched, though he lost heavily by doing so. Indeed, he felt pretty sure that his chance of winning was gone. In any case it would have been a close thing between him and Bertie, and this was quite enough to turn the scale. Well, after all, perhaps this was the best solution. Bertie evidently wanted the money, while for him it was not so important. If his father wished him to go to a public school, the loss of £30 or £60 would not stand in the way, he felt sure. Then his conscience would be at rest, and he would be able to look Bertie and Mrs. Lanyard in the face again.

It showed how tenacious he was of old impressions, that at this time Sophie Zanetti was constantly in his mind. The house in Hamilton Terrace had, for years, been in other hands. The Zanettis, Mrs. Bannock had heard, were abroad, and Sophie's letters had long since ceased. But she, herself, with laughing lips and fearless eyes, was still a power in his life. What would she have said? "Don't be a coward!" Ah yes, an easy thing to say. What would she have done? He knew quite well—with no shadow of doubt. She would have gone straight to Mr. Lanyard and told him the whole story, only that of her there never could have been any such story to tell. And then, as he thought of her and of himself, the difference smote him with an almost intolerable sense of self-contempt.

As soon as the examination was over, he

wrote to his father, trying to prepare him for what he felt would be a heavy disappointment.

“ I wasn’t feeling at all well,” he wrote, “ and for several nights I was awake most of the time. I ought to have gone to the doctor, but Mr. Lanyard would have thought I was making a fuss about nothing. I did worse than I expected in my good subjects, and better than I feared in my bad—especially in the maths. Bertie Squires has got the prize to a certainty, and I doubt whether I’m second—Carter, the cricket captain, thinks he has done awfully well. Generally speaking, he’s quite a fool, but he may have his clever days and these may have been two of them. I hope you won’t be very disgusted with me. I think you really wanted me to go to business at once, and I believe it would be best. I feel as though examinations will always make me ill.”

It was known that there were three examiners, including Mr. Henning, but Mr. Dempsey had reserved to himself the final award. The competitors had not very long to wait. Exactly a week after the examination, the result was announced. Mr. Lanyard came into the big room at tea-time and rapped loudly on the table with a knife-handle.

“ Boys,” he said, “ I have just heard the result of the Dempsey examination and there is no reason why you should not hear it at once. The prize is awarded to Oliver Grimwood. Mr. Dempsey adds that Squires was an excellent second. I gather from his letter, though he does not say so in so many words, that Grim-

wood's essay was the decisive factor in turning the scale. Grimwood, I congratulate you, and I hope that this success may spur you on to fresh efforts."

The words were pleasant enough, but neither Mr. Lanyard's voice nor the expression of his face was really hearty.

"He'd have liked that ass Carter to be the winner," said Bertie. "I'm glad to know that the school won't be disgraced to that extent. I knew you'd do me, so I'm not surprised."

"I am," answered Oliver, shortly. It was characteristic of Bertie to speak of Carter, who had already, on the threshold of the season, made two scores of over 50 and taken 20 wickets, as an ass. School conventions and established reputations were red rags to him, and how he nevertheless had managed to keep his popularity was to Oliver one of the wonders of the world.

### XIII

Oliver had felt so sure of losing the Dempsey that the unexpected success found him unprepared and embarrassed. The first thing to be done was to let his father and Mrs. Bannock know, and as Mrs. Lanyard told him she was writing, but would give him a one-post start, he had to be prompt. The same day, therefore, he wrote to his father. As a rule, letter-writing was no trouble to him, but on this occasion he felt beset with difficulties. The feeling that he



was surrounded by people who, if they knew what he had done, would utterly despise him, turned every word of praise and congratulation into a covert insult. He felt that he would never be happy with that miserable prize on his back, weighing him down like 'Christian's burden in the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Somehow or other it must go to Bertie, but for the moment he could not see a way. Meanwhile he wrote :

“MY DEAR PAPA,—To my great surprise I have got the Dempsey. Mr. Lanyard told us this afternoon, and I am writing at once to let you and Auntie know. I don't think I deserved to win. Bertie Squires ought to have got it and he wants the money badly. I feel quite done up—another exam. would just about finish me, I do believe. My love to Auntie as well as to you. —Your affectionate son,      OLIVER GRIMWOOD.”

The next morning he had a terrible fright. He and Bertie and “Chips” went into the bathroom together.

“Winning that old Dempsey has taken a slate or two off your roof,” said Chips, addressing Oliver.

“It's lucky you didn't have a shot, or you'd have lost the lot,” remarked Bertie. “But,” he added, turning to Oliver, “you did go on as if you were a bit dotty.”

“What do you mean?” asked Oliver. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

Bertie laughed.

“That’s just what we felt last night. You were jawing away about something or other, and fast asleep all the time. King said it was about the Dempsey, but he couldn’t make head or tail of it.”

Here the shower-bath checked conversation, and Oliver was glad of it. This was a new and a very serious danger. There was no knowing what he might blurt out before the whole dormitory. Later in the day, he waylaid Dr. Filliter.

“Please, sir,” he said, “I’ve been talking in my sleep again. The other boys told me about it. Can you give me anything to stop it.”

Dr. Filliter felt his pulse, looked at his tongue, and asked him two or three of the stock questions. Then he smiled and said :

“Let’s see, you’re the boy that has just been getting a prize or scholarship, or something, aren’t you ? Well, you’ve been piling it on a little bit too thick, and you must ease off for a few days. I’ll have a word with Mr. Lanyard and I’ll send you a bottle of tonic that’ll keep you quiet under the bedclothes.”

The doctor was as good as his word, and it may have been due to his tonic that Oliver, for a few nights, slept like a ploughboy and heard no more complaints about speaking or screaming in his sleep.

Almost by return came a letter from Mr. Grimwood :

“MY DEAR OLIVER,—I was very pleased to have your letter, and still more pleased to hear

the news, though I thought all along that you would win the prize. I send you a sovereign to spend as you please. There are four more waiting your return.

“You shall do just as you like about going to Shrewsbury. If you would like to go, but don’t want to have another exam., I will send you there or to some other public school without a scholarship. If you don’t want to go, you can give up your prize to your friend Squires and leave school for business. Fortunately, money is no difficulty. All you need think about is which you would rather do. If you go to a public school and get on well, I will send you to Oxford or Cambridge afterwards.—Your affectionate father,

MARTIN GRIMWOOD.

“Aunt Alice sends her love. She is excessively pleased at your getting the prize.”

This letter increased Oliver’s perplexities. Shrewsbury and then Oxford sounded delightful, especially if he need not try for the entrance scholarships. On the other hand, he hated the idea of keeping the prize-money from his friend Squires, to whom, he told himself, it really belonged. He spent hours and hours trying to calculate what, if anything, he had really gained by that fatal glance. And always he came back to this point—that if he kept the prize and Bertie lost his chance of going to a public school he would never be able to look him in the face again. As it was, the memory poisoned all the



pleasure he might have taken in Mrs. Lanyard's open and liberal praise. She was puzzled and grieved by his apathy, and when she pressed him, she felt sure there was something behind. He was putting pressure on himself, she could see, but all her efforts to win his secret were vain, and she had to fall back on the old explanation.

"Have you noticed how bad Oliver looks?" she asked her husband one evening.

"Oliver? Oh, Grimwood, you mean. He always does look fit for a convalescent home. Is he any worse than usual? I think Filliter was dosing him a few days ago. I believe the boy's unhealthy both in body and mind."

"Don't, Lucius!" she exclaimed vehemently. "He's delicate—anyone can see that—but he's by far the ablest boy in the school."

"It all depends what you mean by able. He may be a musical genius—I'll take that on trust. Dressed up in a velvet suit and a lace collar he'd pass for ten, and make a fortune I dare say."

"Anyway," answered Mrs. Lanyard, quite viciously, "he beat Squires and that lout Carter easily enough for the Dempsey."

"I'm not so sure about 'easily,'" answered her husband. "I don't care much about Squires, but he did uncommonly well, and there weren't many marks between him and Grimwood. It was Grimwood's essay that did the trick, and that's just where a hysterical, neurotic boy might score. As for Reggie, he'll grow up the noblest thing under the sun—a real English

gentleman, and that's better than winning Dempseys."

Mr. Lanyard's voice showed that he was vexed, and his wife was vexed too—with herself.

"I'm sorry I miscalled Reggie," she said, "he's a fine boy, I know, and I'm sure he'll make a fine man. But I really am anxious about Oliver, and I don't think you always do him justice. I'm sure he's not at all well."

Mr. Lanyard had been toying with the *Sportsman* all through the conversation. He had been saving the full reports of half a dozen cricket matches for this hour of leisure, and it was hard to be kept from them by this miserable girl-boy. But his wife's apology had touched him, and he said quite seriously :

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do, my dear. I'll get Filliter to give the boy a real, good overhauling and find out exactly what's wrong—if anything," he couldn't help adding, as he lay back in his chair and opened his beloved paper.

#### XIV

Mrs. Lanyard took care to see the doctor before he examined Oliver, and the result was that the examination was much more careful and prolonged than the usual perfunctory, put-out-your-tongue, what-have-you-been-eating performance that ended with a slap on the back and a dose of "salts." The prodding and tapping and stethoscoping went on till Oliver

felt quite tired out, for his part was by no means a passive one. He had to breathe quickly and slowly, through his mouth, and through his nose, to cough softly and loudly, and finally to touch his toes half a dozen times. When it was all over, Dr. Filliter, who was generally brusque and off-hand with the boys, became so pleasant and smiled so amiably that even Carter would have smelt a rat.

“That’s all right, my boy,” he said, “it’s quite a tiring job, isn’t it? It’s a sort of doctor’s drill, and when we once begin we have to go on to the end. Now you know what I told you the other day. You’ve been overdoing it a little, and you want a holiday—that’s the long and the short of it. By the way, didn’t I give you some medicine?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you take it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Do you any good?”

“Yes, sir. It made me sleep like a top.”

“Well, I’ll make you up some more. But a good holiday will do more for you than gallons of medicine. And whatever you do, don’t worry about your health. You’ve only got to do what you’re told, and you’ll be as right as a trivet.”

To Mr. Lanyard the doctor told a very different tale.

“There are distinct signs of mischief at the apex of the right lung, and the heart-beat is not at all what it should be. The boy looks delicate enough, but he’s a good deal worse than he looks.



He's been doing more work than his physique can stand at present. What he wants is a good rest. When he's had it, I could examine him again, and by that time both the lungs and the heart will give clearer indications."

"You think there really is mischief?"

"I've no doubt of it; but in quite an early stage; it ought to be amenable to treatment."

"Then I suppose I ought to let his father know?"

"I should say so, certainly. It's quite serious enough for that. What sort of a man is he?"

"I don't know much about him—I've only seen him once. The very opposite of the boy, I should say. A hard-headed, self-made, successful man of business, he looks. He's a builder, I think, and well on the way to building a fortune."

"Not the sort to go into hysterics over this?"

Mr. Lanyard smiled.

"No," he answered, "I don't think he is. There's an aunt, though, that may. And Mrs. Lanyard will be terribly upset. It's funny what fancies women take. She thinks no end of him. To me he seems a most unattractive little worm, but I'm very sorry, of course, to hear this."

The same evening, Mr. Lanyard told his wife, and wrote to the boy's father. Mrs. Lanyard was quite as much upset as her husband had expected, but she soon rallied.

"I know Dr. Filliter was a fine oar," she said, "but I don't think very much of him as a doctor. He's too much of an extremist for me. It's either 'Pooh! Pooh!' or 'Order the coffin!'"

Don't you remember, he said Jane had an internal growth and would have to be operated on, and it turned out to be nothing but indigestion ? ”

“ He's very sound, is Filliter,” answered the Head, “ but inclined to be hasty, sometimes, I admit. But this time he was very careful, and when he's really gone into a case, I'd trust him before most doctors.”

“ I wouldn't,” declared the lady, but she admitted that Mr. Grimwood ought to be told.

“ The boy certainly hasn't been well for some time—that's true enough,” she said, and added, “ I'll write a line to Mrs. Bannock myself.”

Mr. Lanyard's letter was characteristic—short, clear, and sensible. Oliver had seemed poorly, the doctor had examined him most carefully, and reported a distinct delicacy of the lungs and a slight irregularity in the action of the heart. There was nothing to be alarmed at, but the doctor thought that a long rest and perhaps a change for a time to a milder climate would be advisable.

Carefully worded as the letter was, it filled Martin with consternation. Mrs. Bannock had not seen him so moved since the death of his wife. As it happened, there was a big post that morning, including a somewhat colourless letter from Oliver himself, saying that he was not feeling very grand, and asking for time to make up his mind as to his future course. It was not till his breakfast was nearly over that Martin reached the schoolmaster's note.

He read it over twice, threw it across the table to his sister, sprang from his chair, and began to pace up and down the room.

"I knew it would come! I knew it would! I knew it!" he kept repeating. "There's Somebody or Something that's got a grudge against me. It's a shame, a damned shame! I've worked hard and lived straight, and paid my way, and first they take 'er and now they take 'im. I say it's a damned shame!"

Even apart from the words, his voice would have told Mrs. Bannock how deeply he was moved. Usually he spoke in a rough, growling tone that was neither loud nor distinct. Now the words rang out clear and hard, and behind them was a passion of anger and fear. She noticed, too, the dropping of the aitches, a slip of which he was hardly ever guilty.

"Don't talk like that, Martin," she said soothingly, "I've got a letter here from Mrs. Lanyard. She says their doctor is a bit of an alarmist. She herself thinks Oliver has been overdone with his examination. She is sure he was very anxious to please you, and the excitement has been too much for him."

"That makes it all the worse," he cried. "He's the one thing left me that I really love, and he loves me, and now I'm to be robbed of him."

"Who says you are? Not Mr. or Mrs. Lanyard or the doctor. They all say the delicacy will yield to treatment. If I were to talk as you do, you'd tell me I was a silly, hysterical woman."

He sat down again.



“Very likely I should,” he said, his voice much more natural already. “Anyway, you’ve put new life into me. Let’s see—what is it he says?”—she handed him the letter—“Yes—there’s nothing to be alarmed at. Some old woman of a doctor—I know the kind well enough. Well, we’ll have the boy back at once and you shall take him to Devonshire. We’ll have a specialist, though, first. I’ve a little more faith in them. They see a good many cases in their own line, and if they’ve any wits at all they’re bound to pick up a wrinkle or two. Write and tell them to send him back, or why not go and fetch him yourself?”

“Why not, indeed?” she answered. “I’ll write and say that I am coming. I should like to talk things over with Mrs. Lanyard.”

As soon as Oliver came home, he was hurried down to Harley Street, this time in charge of Martin himself. Oliver was getting used to the stethoscope and bore the examination very philosophically. Dr. Villiers was very different from Dr. Filliter. He was tall, lean, and spectacled, dressed as if his clothes had just come home from Bond Street, precise in speech as if each word were a separate item in the account. When the stethoscope had been put away and while Oliver was dressing, the doctor began writing. Oliver had finished first, and his father whispered to him to wait outside. As the door closed, Dr. Villiers laid down his pen and Martin his two guineas.

“Thank you, Mr. Grimwood,” said the doctor.

“I have written two prescriptions, and have added some directions which I think will be helpful. The prognosis I consider by no means unhelpful.”

“The what?” demanded Martin roughly. He was determined to have his guineas’ worth. “Look here, Dr. Villiers, I’m only a plain business man, and I want to know in plain English the exact truth about that boy’s health. Are his lungs or his heart, or both of them, rotten?”

This time the doctor looked rather startled. Neither the words nor the tone was what he was accustomed to. His patients usually received their good news, and their bad, with politeness, if not with an affectation of indifference. He hesitated, but Martin was on him again in a moment.

“Did you hear my question? I don’t want any ‘preparing’ or any nonsense of that sort.”

Dr. Villiers stood up. He was outraged, and he meant to show it.

“It is not easy, Mr. Grimwood,” he said, “to answer your question, because your language is strangely unsuited to the subject.”

“Then tell me the truth in your own language: I’ve got a dictionary at home,” answered Martin, and as he spoke, he came very near to the specialist.

“The cardiac irregularity is so slight as to be practically negligible,” answered Dr. Villiers, accepting the challenge. “In the absence of untoward developments, the boy ought easily to outgrow it.”

“Heart’s all right,” Martin translated to himself. “Now, what about the lungs?”

“There is a slight but quite distinct crepitation at the apex of the left lung.”

“Left or right?” interjected Martin sharply.

“At the apex of the left lung,” the doctor repeated, with a slight but quite distinct frown.

“I should advise you to take the boy to Hastings or Ventnor for some considerable time—say, till next spring. He will of course be under the eye of a medical practitioner—there are highly competent men at both places. Good food and plenty of it, moderate exercise suited to his strength, and a most scrupulous avoidance of chills—these are the chief things to think about, and if they are attended to, I have every hope of a successful issue.”

“The school doctor said it was the right lung that was fishy,” remarked Martin, moving back slowly as the doctor came to the table.

“I am not responsible for the opinion of the school doctor,” answered the specialist icily, and rang his bell for the next patient.

## XV

Little was said to Oliver about his health either by his father or by Mrs. Bannock. He asked no questions and they thought he felt no anxiety or even curiosity about it.

“Dr. Villiers thinks you are run down,” said Mrs. Bannock. “You are growing fast, and it



has been too much for your strength. You are to take a good long rest somewhere in the country.”

“Then I can’t keep the Dempsey?” he asked.

“No; I don’t see how you can,” she answered.

“I’m not sorry,” he remarked after a pause. “Bertie will get it. That’ll be all right.”

“What a dear, unselfish boy Oliver is,” the good lady remarked late that evening to her brother. “I’m sure he wanted badly to win that Dempsey prize, and yet now he seems quite pleased that his friend should have it.”

That kind of unselfishness did not appeal to Martin. He was too fond of the boy to suffer such a slur upon his character.

“He won it: that’s the great thing. As for the money, he knows it’s neither here nor there to me. Those Squires people are poor devils, as far as I can make out, and I dare say it’s a big thing for them to get Oliver’s leavings.”

And he chuckled, pleased at this happy way of putting the matter.

Oliver’s own feelings were much more complex than either his father or his aunt imagined. He had never been able to make up his mind whether he would have won the prize on his merits. Considering the closeness of the marks, he doubted it. From that point of view he felt it a great relief that Bertie should have the money. As it was, the promised £5 had been already paid him, and the thought of the books he could buy gave him a great deal of pleasure. On

the other hand, his weakness, and the concealment and duplicity it had involved, were constantly with him. The thought of Mr. Lan-  
yard's almost brutal honesty and straightforwardness seemed to frighten him; it made his own evasions seem unutterably contemptible. And then there was Sophie. She too rebuked him, but in a very different way. He puzzled over the difference, and could get no further than "She would have understood."

As for his health, his feelings varied a good deal. A headache or a fit of coughing would fill him with apprehensions. Then he would recall every word, every gesture of the doctors, and read into them a sinister meaning. On the bookshelf in Mrs. Bannock's room stood a thick, unprepossessing volume entitled *Homœopathy in Health and Disease*. By a little management he could often contrive to read it without being observed, and he knew the pages on consumption pretty well by heart. There were a good many other pages too, through which, with the aid of his *Pantologia*—so the old encyclopædia in Martin's study was named—he made his way. With his quick and sensitive imagination, every little symptom became ominous. He could—and would—have dosed himself for them all, but, unfortunately, Mrs. Bannock kept her globules and tinctures under lock and key.

The light and easy way in which everyone spoke to him of his ailments did not, for a single moment, deceive him. He felt sure that the doctors thought his a hopeless case, and that his

father and aunt were deeply anxious. But—strangely enough, it may seem—the idea of dying did not frighten him. Death was something still remote, and touched with a faint glow of romance. It invested him—in his own eyes—with a new interest and a certain pathetic dignity. The Boy About to Die looked quite a different character from the trembling little sneak. There were days, however, when he felt perfectly well. Even then the idea of death was present in his mind, but, on these occasions, merely as a piece of theatrical property. At such times the thought of the opportunity he had lost made him wretched, so that, paradoxically, he was in better spirits when he felt ill than when he felt well.

It was in July that Mrs. Bannock took him down to Ventnor. They had very comfortable rooms, the weather was lovely, he had a number of new books, and at first he enjoyed the change. An odd volume of Robert Browning's poems had fallen into his hands, and he had just added two more volumes. He already knew "How they brought the Good News," "Evelyn Hope," "The Lost Leader," and half a dozen others by heart. The vigour and strength of this new poet braced him like a tonic. When he could escape from Mrs. Bannock's precautionary attentions he loved to find some lonely spot where he might declaim his favourites to the sea. Better still, he liked pretending to himself that he had written them, and imagining all kinds of occasions on which he recited them for the first time to an



admiring audience. As quite a small boy he had made occasional attempts to write verse, and had once concocted a hymn which Mrs. Bannock pronounced beautiful, and of which Martin had secretly taken a copy. School had interrupted this development, but now it began again, and he was astonished and delighted at the facility with which he could turn out lines that seemed to him, as he wrote them, not so unlike Wordsworth, and Longfellow, and even Browning. He wrote them on odd scraps of paper and then copied them out into a small blue morocco manuscript book with gilt edges. A week after they were written they did not read quite so well as at first, but there was generally a fresh one coming, which would eclipse all the others. As the book began to fill, a new set of happy dreams filled his waking, and sometimes his sleeping hours.

Every week-end, without fail, Martin came down to Ventnor, and on one of these occasions Oliver showed his father the blue morocco book. Involuntarily, Mr. Grimwood pulled a long face, but the next moment he asked for the book and studied it for some time. Then he said :

“ Well, my boy, I’m no judge of poetry, but if you get this book full, I’ll see about having it published. There’s a promise, and you know I keep them—eh ? ”

“ Yes, father, I know you do,” answered Oliver heartily.

By that time summer had gone, and the fine autumn days too. The weather had broken and

the nights were cold. In spite of, or owing to, precautions and restrictions, Oliver had caught the dreaded chill, and his cough not only scared Mrs. Bannock but convinced the boy himself that his hour had come. Hence his muse naturally clothed herself in crape. Martin was horrified at the latest crop of poems, which all hymned the lonely and neglected tomb.

“It’s wonderful to me how he writes them,” he said to Mrs. Bannock, “but he must be feeling very bad. What does this fool of a doctor down here say about him?”

“I don’t think Dr. Badland understands the case,” she answered. “He’s very young, and he seems to me to be always trying dangerous experiments. He’s always wanting me to have the poor boy out in the open air, as if he didn’t catch cold at the very least thing. He takes him out driving with him when it’s not at all the sort of weather for it, and he really doesn’t seem to understand the danger. You know what a dreadful cough Oliver has, but Dr. Badland seems to think nothing of it. He declares the boy’s full of fancies. Fancies indeed! If he suffered as the dear boy does, he’d soon talk in a very different way. If Dr. Villiers hadn’t recommended him so strongly, I should have thought it would be better to have someone else in. I believe there’s a homœopath——”

“Oh, hang the doctors!” exclaimed Martin irritably. “They seem just as bad as the parsons, though you’d have thought they’d really got something to go upon. But I’ll tell you



what I'll do. I've heard of a man in Wimpole Street—Dr. Vaisey his name is. They say he's a real coming man, not an old fogey like that last one. What was his name ? ”

“ Dr. Villiers, do you mean ? ”

“ Yes, insolent old ruffian. I'll take Oliver up with me to-morrow and we'll go straight to Wimpole Street. I'll send him back on Tuesday.”

Mrs. Bannock raised a few objections, which Martin promptly overruled. Oliver was delighted to be going back to London, if only for a day. Martin was delighted, because he attributed the boy's pleasure to the fact that they were to travel together. Indeed, the boy was pleased to be in his father's company, and their errand was not distasteful to him. He rather enjoyed detailing his symptoms and adding little imaginative touches from time to time.

Dr. Richard Vaisey was a much younger man than Dr. Villiers, and both father and son liked him much better. Oliver was attracted by the twinkle in his eye, and his straightforward, business-like manner commended him to Martin.

“ You know the ropes, young man, I can see that,” said the doctor, and Oliver smiled. The doctor smiled back in the most friendly way. “ Just a tiny bit *too* well, do you think ? ” he went on. “ I don't think there's much in that last bit, about feeling giddy in the dark, is there ? It's quite good in its way, but that's not my way, is it ? ”

“ I don't know ; perhaps not,” answered Oliver, looking at the doctor, and surrendering



to the twinkle. "I expect I fancy things, sometimes."

"A very fine thing to do," said Dr. Vaisey, "if you fancy the right things. I want you to fancy that there's nothing the matter with you. Think you can do it?"

"If you tell me to, I think I can."

"I like that boy of yours, Mr. Grimwood," said the doctor, when Oliver had gone back to the waiting-room. "He's got brains, and he's got a sense of humour, and the two things don't always go together."

"It's his health I'm worried about," said Martin shortly.

"You needn't be," answered the doctor. "He'll outlive both of us by a good many years. He's had a touch in one lung, but only a touch, and there's no mischief now."

"And his heart?"

"A very decent heart as hearts go nowadays."

"And do you really think he'll pull round?"

"He *has* pulled round. What he wants now is to be treated as an ordinary healthy boy—not overpressed, of course, either in work or play, but not coddled or fussed over."

It was dusk when they found themselves in the street again. Martin called a hansom and drove to a big restaurant in the Strand, where they had what seemed to Oliver a dinner fit for a king. Then they walked to St. James's Hall and heard the Moore and Burgess Minstrels.

At home, Kate and cook received him with a

demonstrative welcome. He slept from the time his head touched the pillow till Kate called him in the morning. At breakfast Martin eyed him with satisfaction.

“ You heard what the doctor said about you ? ” he remarked.

Till that moment Oliver had forgotten that he had a cough. As a rule he kept his ailments up to the mark, not allowing them to disappear with indecent precipitancy. At Ventnor he would have produced something of a cough, if it had not obtruded itself. Now, he remembered Dr. Vaisey’s twinkle, and determined to keep to the compact he felt he had made with it.”

“ Yes, papa,” he answered.

“ Well, my boy, that’s a fine thing. I was afraid you might be going to have quite a long illness, and now he says you’re really well again. You’re going back to Ventnor this morning, because we’ll have to give a week’s notice and we may as well have our pennyworth. But this run up seems to have done you good. You look fine ; you really do. You’ve enjoyed it, haven’t you ? ”

“ Yes, indeed, I have. I love going about with you.”

It was the very thing for which Martin had been hoping and fishing. His face lightened up wonderfully.

“ You shall too, when we’re back again. An English boy ought to know his London like a book. We’ll go out together on Saturdays perhaps. And you must make up your mind

what you'd like to be. You could go back to Eastbourne if you like."

"No!" exclaimed Oliver quickly.

"Some other school, then?" queried his father.

"No; I should like to go to business—with you."

"So you shall, then," said Martin, "and here's a sovereign for some new books. I'll see that you get plenty of time for reading."



## BOOK II

### I

THE flying visit to London and the interview with Dr. Vaisey always stood out in Oliver's memory as one of the big milestones in his life. All that lay behind it belonged to his childhood. The conversation he had with his father the next morning was—to change the metaphor—the first chapter of a new book in his story. From that time, certainly, a great change began.

Dr. Vaisey's opinion as to his health proved correct. Although never robust, he steadily outgrew his extreme delicacy. The conditions under which he lived were exceptionally favourable, for Martin, in his own much shrewder way, was as anxious and careful about the boy as Mrs. Bannock herself. Every summer the three took a holiday at Lowestoft, and though Martin constantly ran up to town, Oliver and Mrs. Bannock enjoyed six uninterrupted weeks of bracing sea air. He became an ardent bicyclist and, later, grew enthusiastic over lawn tennis.

These pursuits, besides their immediate effect on his physical health, had other and at least equally important results, notably this—that he began to form a circle of friends for himself.

Mrs. Bannock was a sound churchwoman, and Martin, though he never attended a service, paid for three sittings at St. John's, Avenue Road. Oliver went regularly with his aunt, and joined a young men's guild, organised by an energetic curate who soon discovered his literary tastes and abilities. There was also a cricket and tennis club in connection with the church, and on the courts Oliver made several acquaintances of the opposite sex. Mrs. Bannock encouraged this sociability, and Martin did nothing to discourage it. The lawn at home was not quite large enough to allow of a full-sized tennis court, but croquet was still enjoying its earlier popularity, and Mrs. Bannock often arranged small, informal afternoon garden-parties, for the ponderous game of patience and quarrels. At first, Oliver was shy and awkward with his visitors, but the feeling soon wore off, and his engagements multiplied so fast that Mrs. Bannock was astonished, and sometimes even a little dismayed.

These relaxations, of course, were confined to the evenings and Saturday afternoons. The day was devoted to business. Martin's first idea had been to let the boy learn carpentry and plumbing and the other branches of the manual work, practically, in the workshops. But when the time came for the start, he suddenly changed his mind. "No," he said to himself, "I'm not going to turn a silk purse into a sow's ear. The boy's a born gentleman, and he shall keep his hands clean." So, instead of going to the bench, Oliver went to Duke Street, Manchester

Square, where Martin had recently opened an estate agency office.

“Pringle,” he said to the manager whom he had installed there, “I’m going to bring my boy into this office at Easter. He’s been a bit delicate, and I’m not going to force him to do anything he doesn’t like to. But I’d be very glad to see him take to this work, and I want you to do your best with him. That’s a bit outside what I engaged you for, and though I don’t throw my money away, I know what’s reasonable. If by Christmas the boy is getting on all right and wants to keep on, it’ll be an extra £50 to you for a Christmas-box—see ?”

Pringle did see. He was a suave and imposing gentleman who always wore a frock coat, and his hands and cuffs immediately reminded Oliver of Dr. Villiers, the most shining example in these respects he had ever seen. The offices were not unworthy of the manager. The front room was large and lofty. Nearly opposite the door was a huge mahogany office-table with a number of books and papers on it, all arranged in the most perfect order. At this table, in a revolving mahogany chair, Mr. Pringle was accustomed to sit. Against the wall, on his left hand, stood a high, narrow bookcase filled with books lettered on the backs. At the other end of the room was a smaller table, at which, on an ordinary office-chair, sat Jevons, a young clerk just within hail of his majority. Behind him, a door led into a smaller office where Dick, the office boy, addressed envelopes and took



copies of letters, when he was not looking out of the window or reading the current number of *The Boys of Britain*.

When Oliver came to Duke Street, he found a third table and a second revolving chair awaiting him. Mr. Pringle was extremely pleasant, while Jevons was quite obsequious, and always called him "sir," an attention which gave Oliver great satisfaction.

So he began his business training under conditions that might almost be called luxurious—too luxurious, perhaps, for the attainment of efficiency. Besides his own property, which was now considerable, Martin had secured the management of two large estates, the Petre and the Dacres. What with sales, lettings, repairs, and legal difficulties, there was always plenty of business in the office. The office routine work was not very exhilarating, but Pringle took care that Oliver was not overdone with it, and, as far as possible, reserved for him anything of interest that cropped up. The boy liked going about with Jevons to the various properties, and—better still—going to the works where Martin's building business was carried on. Rough and harsh with his employees, with him Martin was wonderfully patient, always welcoming him almost as a visitor, and taking endless trouble to explain details and remove difficulties. Gradually, the boy picked up the office work, and Pringle became quite enthusiastic over his style in correspondence.

"He's got a wonderful knack of putting

things," said the manager. "He makes an ultimatum sound like an invitation."

This was not Martin's way at all, but he saw that Pringle was praising Oliver, and his smile showed that he was pleased.

"He's a bit too easygoing at present," he answered, "but time hardens us all. I was like that, myself, once."

Pringle wondered when, but he was far too discreet to ask the question.

## II

"You haven't forgotten, have you, Auntie, that Bertie is coming to dinner this evening?"

"I had forgotten it, completely. How lucky you mentioned it."

"That's not luck," growled Martin, standing up and shaking the crumbs out of his napkin, "it's common sense. He knows your memory's getting slow, so he gives it a jog."

"It's what it wants," said Mrs. Bannock placidly. "I'm sure you've told me several times what Bertie is doing, but I can't remember for the moment."

"He's at Cambridge. He got a scholarship at Trinity in mathematics. He always was good at maths."

"Is that the boy who got the prize you wouldn't take?" asked Martin.

"Yes," answered Oliver, "and he's made ten times the use of it that I should have done. He

used to be a bit lazy at Lanyard's, but he works like a nigger now, and he's always getting prizes and scholarships."

"The lot of them don't come to what you are getting, I know," said Martin, with the smile that so often lit up his face when he looked at Oliver.

"No, I'm sure they don't. I believe I'm about the only bad bargain you ever made."

"It's my way to take risks sometimes," said Martin. "Get your coat on; we're none too early now."

When Oliver came home in the evening, he found Bertie in the drawing-room talking easily and affably with Mrs. Bannock. The boys had kept up a vigorous correspondence, but only saw one another at rare intervals. They were a curious contrast in appearance. Oliver at eighteen was just about the middle height, but his slimness made him look taller. His face was not so spare, and the soft contours, fair hair and complexion, and sloping shoulders, all suggested a delicacy that in a young man was almost effeminate. In his own way, however, he was very good-looking, indeed the worst that could be said of him was that he was distinctly pretty.

This was a charge that no one would ever have brought against Bertie Squires. He was a couple of inches shorter, and as plump as Oliver was lean. His face was as white as ever, and his hair as straight and black, but his eyes looked larger and not so beady as when he was a boy at Mr. Lanyard's.



They shook hands and Bertie laughed.

“You haven’t forgotten how to do it, then.”

“Do what?” asked Oliver, looking puzzled.

“Why, blush, of course. There you go—all over your face.”

“Rubbish! It’s coming out of the cold air. Fancy, blushing for you!”

“You might do worse. I’ve never been able to do it for myself.”

“I expect you never needed to,” suggested Mrs. Bannock politely, and this time, at any rate, Oliver’s face did fly the genuine scarlet flag.

“Lucifer wouldn’t have said so, would he?” said Bertie.

The question was addressed to Oliver, but before he could answer, Mr. Grimwood came in, and Bertie was introduced. Then the dinner bell rang, and they went into the dining-room.

“So you’re at Cambridge, I hear,” remarked Mr. Grimwood.

“Yes, sir,” answered Bertie with a sigh.

Martin looked up sharply.

“H’m; you don’t seem very proud of it?” he said. “I thought it was no end of a fine place.”

“The place is right enough,” answered Bertie, “but it doesn’t seem to appreciate me. No place does, for the matter of that. Don’t you remember how they were always going on at me when we were at Lanyard’s?” he added, turning to Oliver.

“Not a bit more than you deserved,” returned Oliver, delighted at this chance of reprisal.

“ You were about as lazy as they make them, till just at the end.”

“ Ah, it was a lucky thing for me you didn’t take that Dempsey you won. It made all the difference to me.”

Mr. Grimwood fancied—quite wrongly—that he could detect a note of superiority. He answered quickly.

“ It’s made all the difference to Oliver too. He’s on the high road now to making a nice little fortune—eh, Oliver ? ”

Oliver smiled. The mention of the Dempsey had frightened him. He hated the name, and was anxious to get away from the subject. Bertie, however, seemed interested.

“ I wish *I* were. A nice little fortune is just my mark. I suppose you ought to make it before you spend it ; my father always says I’m reversing the process.”

“ Have you made up your mind what you’re going to be ? ” asked Mrs. Bannock.

Bertie leaned back in his chair, considering.

“ My father insists on a profession. I’m not ferocious enough for the army or navy. I’m not nearly good enough for the Church—though I *have* thought of the Dissenting pulpit. That leaves medicine and law. I’ve seen what a doctor’s life is, and I’m not going to leave my regular night’s rest at the mercy of any small child’s tummy-ache. So, by a process of elimination, I arrive at law.”

“ You’ll look fine in a wig and gown,” said Oliver. “ They’ll just suit your style of beauty.”

“ I’ve got a fine retort, if we were alone, but I’m afraid of Mr. Grimwood—he’s taken a dislike to me already.”

This was so startlingly true that Martin looked quite disconcerted for a moment and, curiously enough, in that moment began to change his mind.

“ Well, young man,” he said, “ I’m not a bad judge of men, and I believe you’ll do very well at the bar.”

“ Thank you, sir,” answered Bertie. “ You needn’t have told us that you were a good judge of men.”

After dinner, Martin retired to his study for a nap, while the others went into the drawing-room. Oliver played a Chopin mazurka, and Bertie, after much pressing, sang a pair of highly sentimental songs. Just as the second reached an end, Martin came in and sat down in an arm-chair. Mrs. Bannock guessed at once the reason of his appearance. The one game of which he was really fond was whist, and a visitor was to him not so much a guest as a fourth hand. At the same time, as she also knew, he was too proud to ask for a game, and was waiting for her to take the initiative.

“ Can’t we have a rubber ? ” she asked. “ Martin, you’ll play, won’t you ? ”

“ Well, just one, if you like,” he answered.

He and Mrs. Bannock played partners against the boys. Oliver was a poor player, though he occasionally held magnificent hands, but Bertie played like an old stager.



The seniors just won, and Martin became quite genial.

"You play a fine game," he said to Bertie. "You're smart, I can see that."

"It's his beastly mathematics," remarked Oliver. "He looks upon everything as a problem."

"You didn't help me much to solve it, old man," said Bertie, and Martin chuckled, but stopped himself.

"He gave you one fine hand," he declared.

"Yes, and led clubs when diamonds was the obvious thing."

Bertie was stopping with an uncle in Bayswater, and Oliver walked with him to Baker Street. Three times on the way, Bertie stopped, each time at an empty house.

"That's a nice little crib," he said, the first time. "Double-fronted, too, and bow windows. Only two floors, not counting the basement, but there must be three rooms on the ground floor, and a very fair size."

"Yes," answered Oliver, "I've often been in them. I know the people who used to live there."

"I suppose there's a bathroom?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I generally have my baths at home."

Bertie said nothing more, but a few minutes later stopped under a "To Let" board, and pushed the gate open.

"No bathroom there," said Oliver decisively.

"Don't you think so? No, perhaps not, and I

never like those tall semi-detached houses. Look at the steps, too. Shouldn't like to clean them."

"No, I think maths. would suit you better."

The third halt was at Kent Terrace. Bertie insisted on diverging from the main road to see a corner house which was empty. He was quite enthusiastic.

"That's very nearly ideal," he exclaimed. "Quite good class in appearance, capital position—nice garden in front, and the Park behind—and very comfortable, I should say. I wonder whether we could get in. There may be a caretaker."

Accustomed as he was to Bertie's eccentricities, Oliver firmly drew the line at ten-o'clock house-hunting.

"What's the joke?" he said. "Are you doing it for a wager, or are you thinking of getting married? It'll take a good many scholarships to keep up any of these houses."

"It's an idea of mine," his friend replied. "I believe in looking well ahead. It's the only royal road to success. Some time or other I shall want a house. Instead of waiting till the last moment and then choosing one in a panic, I keep my eyes open, and whenever I see one to let I go over it and note its good points and its bad. All the time, I'm forming a standard, and when the time comes, it'll be an easy job pitching on one that comes up to it."

"You should come to us. We could give you dozens of houses to go over," remarked Oliver.

“So I might. Well, if you come across anything out-of-the-way good, mind you let me know at once.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Oliver. “I’ll send you a copy of our monthly list of eligible properties.”

### III

The blue morocco manuscript book was not much fuller than when Oliver was at Ventnor. His entry into business life and his new sociability seemed to have arrested his literary development. He himself would have said that now he had not time for composition, but, besides that, he had little inclination for it. At first, indeed, even his taste for discursive reading failed him. Before long, however, this returned—with a difference. His favourite books had been of the “improving” kind—History, Macaulay’s *Essays*, and Travels. His fiction had been chiefly the tales of Kingston and Ballantyne. When he resumed his reading it was to make the acquaintance of Sir Walter, Harrison Ainsworth, Bulwer Lytton, and then Dickens and Thackeray. For a year or two, he read hardly anything but novels.

Then, quite suddenly, he found a new occupation for his evenings. As a small boy, he had been very fond of drawing, and one of his prizes at Eastbourne had been for an elaborately stippled study of the Young Augustus, which was hung, handsomely framed, in Martin’s study.



One day he saw in a curiosity shop a small copy of the cast. It reminded him of old days, and he went in and bought it for a couple of shillings. That night he set it before him on the dining-room table and made sketches of it in different positions, sketches which Mrs. Bannock pronounced wonderful. The next day he went down to Castle's in Long Acre, and bought chalks and paper, and a large cast of the Venus of Milo's face. For nearly a month he worked hard at these, and the praise he received from Mrs. Bannock and some of her friends began to turn his head, and dreams of an artistic career to fill it. Fresh from a third reading of *The Newcomes* he told himself that though he might never be a J. J., the spirit and facility of Clive might be within his scope. Still, he had sense enough to be conscious of his deficiencies, but he made up his mind to give himself a chance.

Glancing idly through the columns of the local newspaper, his eye fell on an advertisement which at once engaged his attention. It was headed in capitals "ARTISTIC," and ran thus :

"Mr. Arthur Kildene, regular exhibitor at many of the leading galleries, conducts evening classes for practice in drawing. Antique, Life. Four nights a week. Terms very moderate. Apply any evening, The Bungalow, 5 Rutland Street, Camden Town."

"The very thing," he said to himself, and on the first free evening he made a pilgrimage to Camden Town.

There was no difficulty in finding Rutland Street, and No. 5 was conspicuous enough, a big, tall, detached house, newly painted and smart in the matter of blinds and curtains. But there was no name on the door-posts, and a return of his old shyness made Oliver hesitate to ring the bell. At last, however, he grew ashamed of himself, gave an energetic pull and walked up the steps.

“Is this the Bungalow?” he asked the smart parlourmaid who answered the door.

“No,” she answered. “The Bungalow is at the back of the garden, along there”—she pointed. “There’s a separate bell for it, outside—you’d better ring that.”

Oliver apologised with due humility, and found the bell, which had under it a brass plate so small as to be hardly noticeable. On this, by the aid of a match, he deciphered—“The Bungalow, Kildene.” Having rung the bell, he walked along the side-path indicated by the servant, and at the end of the garden found a low, one-storey building, which ran the whole width of the garden and had, on one side, a huge window. Just as he reached the door, it opened, and a young man in shirt sleeves appeared.

“Mr. Kildene?” Oliver inquired politely.

“Yes and no,” answered the young man. “My name’s Kildene, but I’m not the Kildene you want—at least I expect not. But the right one’ll be in, in a minute. If you’ll come inside and he doesn’t turn up within five minutes, I’ll go and get him. It’s the art school you want, isn’t it?”

Oliver admitted that it was so.

“I was sure of it. You’ve got the regular Academy face. I always know his pupils from mine, in a minute. I’ll leave the door on the jar, for him. He’s Arthur, I’m Julian. He draws the figure and I draw an audience—when I get the chance—but we neither draw quite as many of the dibs as we should like to.”

He spoke in a jerky, jaunty manner, which somehow managed to invest his words with a certain humorous significance. As he spoke, he led the way through a dark and narrow passage into a fair-sized room lighted by a single candle crazily slanting in one of the sconces of a piano. As far as Oliver could see in the dim and flickering light, everything was in the wildest confusion. Julian took a tea-tray, a clean shirt and half a dozen newspapers from a big arm-chair.

“There,” he said, “sit down. There are some cigarettes in that red box. Help yourself. I was trying to vamp an accompaniment to a little song I’ve been making up. Would you like to hear it?”

Oliver of course said “yes,” and the young man sat down, and after playing a few chords struck up the following ditty:

“Becky and I went out on the sly,  
Don’t you tell! Don’t you tell!  
We went out at eight, we stopped out quite late,  
Don’t you tell! Don’t you tell!  
Becky’s a sweet little blossom of forty,  
Awfully nice, if a little bit naughty,  
Where *do* you suppose she said we must go?  
I’m afraid you’ll be shocked if the truth you must know.  
H’sh! H’sh! H’sh! H’sh!  
She insisted on calling on Madame Tussaud.”



“Then comes a lot of gag about the wax figures and the chamber of horrors and so on, and then comes the second verse :

“Becky and I came back in a fly.”

This was as far as he got, for at that moment the door opened, and another young man appeared, obviously the missing brother. In height and build and features the likeness was unmistakable, though the singer was very dark and the new-comer very fair.

“Ah,” said Julian, shutting up the piano with a bang, “here’s Arthur. Arthur, this is your show now.”

“I saw the advertisement in the local paper,” said Oliver.

“Oh yes—‘Artistic’ you mean. Well, it’s most of it true, only we’re not quite so formal as you might think from reading it. The place is really open every night, Sundays and all.”

“Except in Lent,” Julian interposed.

“All right,” said Arthur, “Lent’s a long way off yet. Then there isn’t very much teaching. I believe in giving men plenty of rope—they can let themselves down, it’s true, but more often they pull themselves up?”

“And it’s handy,” put in Julian again, “if they want to hang themselves.”

“Are you an amateur?” asked Arthur.

With a flush, Oliver admitted the charge.

“I’m no good at all,” he declared, “but I’m fond of drawing. I used to do a bit at school, and I’d like to get on a bit further.”

“ Well, I’ll tell you what. Come for a month, and see how you get on. Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday are the big nights, because we have the model sitting then. Wednesday—well, you can see for yourself that it’s a slack night. Friday and Saturday we don’t profess to be open, but, as a matter of fact, we are. Sundays too, for the matter of that, but there’s not much work done, I’ll admit. There are generally some of Julian’s friends to sing hymns with him.”

“ And some of your friends,” said Julian, “ to pull the R.A.’s to bits.”

Oliver felt that he had stumbled into a strange place, but the brothers attracted him.

“ I’d like to try for a month,” he said. “ If you find me hopeless, you must tell me.”

“ If he does, you’d better try my side of the shop,” remarked Julian. “ Think of the pleasure you could give your friends.”

And he began humming :

“ Becky and I were uncommonly dry.”

Oliver thought of his father and Mrs. Bannock, and suddenly broke into a loud laugh. The brothers looked up in surprise.

“ Hullo ! ” exclaimed Julian, “ did I make a joke without knowing it ? ”

“ Yes,” answered Oliver, “ a real good one, too.”

“ Wicked extravagance ! ” grumbled the joker. “ That’s the worst of being born funny.”

## IV

When Oliver announced at home his intention of attending drawing classes, both Martin and Mrs. Bannock were secretly dismayed, for to both of them he was the light of the house. Fortunately, however, for Oliver's plan, Mrs. Bannock openly bewailed the dullness that his absence would involve, whereupon Martin promptly declared that this was all rubbish, and that he was glad to see Oliver prepared to strike out a line for himself. But Mrs. Bannock's misgivings were not merely, or mainly, selfish. She had known the boy as a child, and, fond as she was of him, she had no great faith in his strength of will. He was "a good, dear boy" at home, and the more and the longer he stopped there the better.

Martin's support, however, settled the question, and on the next Wednesday Oliver went to the Bungalow as a pupil. The studio was a large room, thirty feet, perhaps, in length by about twenty in width. In the centre of the room stood a low platform, round which were ranged seven or eight easels. On the walls hung a number of casts from the antique, and from a pedestal at the end of the room Michael Angelo's "Slave" looked down.

He found Arthur Kildene alone, busy over a small drawing—the head of a girl."

"Oh, that is fine!" Oliver exclaimed impulsively.



Arthur was evidently pleased.

“I’m glad you like it,” he said. “There’s some feeling behind it.”

The feeling was apparent in his tone, which changed immediately, however, as he went on to discuss Oliver’s work.

“Try something you like the look of,” he said, and Oliver chose a small cast of “Clytie.” For nearly an hour they worked, almost in silence. Then Arthur filled a pipe and came over to Oliver’s seat.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed, “that’s not half bad. *You’ve* got some feeling, young man, but that neck’s not quite right, is it? Look here.”

And with a piece of charcoal he drew a new line.

“There,” he said. “See if that doesn’t work out better.”

This time his mood seemed to have changed, and he talked incessantly, asking questions and volunteering information till they really knew a good deal about each other’s circumstances.

“You’ll find it much more lively to-morrow,” he remarked when Oliver said good-night. “Have you ever drawn from the life?”

“No. It’s no good my coming, is it?”

“Oh yes. It’ll do you all the good in the world to have a shot at it. You mustn’t mind if the other fellows chaff a bit. They’re a very decent lot and you’ll learn a lot from them. There are one or two swells sometimes come down. There’s Hector Camroux—he’s French, but talks

English almost like a native. He's doing uncommonly well. And there's Mount, he could wipe out the lot of us—will, very likely, only he's a little bit wild, is Master Geoff. He only knows us by fits and starts. Campbell's just the opposite, a nice, quiet chap, as steady as an old horse. Then—let's see—Giles and Sanday are going to be architects, but they can both draw a bit. If you don't want to start the life at once, you can go on with Clytie for a bit. Everyone's his own master down here."

The next evening Oliver went to the Bungalow, feeling quite excited and more than a little shy. Under such conditions he always looked most engaging. The class was supposed to begin at 8 o'clock, and as he had no fancy for walking into a room full of strangers, he took care to be punctual. He was not, however, the first. A dark, foreign-looking young fellow was going in at the gate as he came up, and they walked up the path together. "This," said Oliver to himself, "must be Camroux. He looks ever so much younger than I should have expected, and shabbier too, but he seems friendly." Indeed he smiled most amiably, and Oliver, returning the smile, spoke.

"Mr. Camroux?" he said.

"No, sare," answered the stranger, his smile becoming deprecatory, "I am Vanelli, ze model."

A little upset by this incident, Oliver was relieved to find himself the first arrival. Kildene was sitting in a horsehair-covered easy-chair,

smoking his pipe and reading a novel. He shook his head.

“ Too punctual, Grimwood,” he said. “ Doesn’t look like the artistic temperament. Have you made up your mind what you’ll do—Vanelli or Clytie ? ”

“ I think I’ll stick to the lady.”

“ All right. Then, if you don’t mind, you’d better plant yourself over there. You’ll find the light quite good.”

Just as Oliver had made his arrangements and begun work, a tall young man came in.

“ Good evening, Giles,” said Arthur, “ isn’t Sanday coming ? ”

“ No, he’s got a beastly cold, and I’m not sure that he hasn’t given it to me. Is Vanelli here ? ”

“ Yes, he’ll be in before you’re ready. This is a new member of our class—Mr. Oliver Grimwood.”

Giles honoured the new-comer with a friendly nod.

“ ‘Cademy ? ” he asked.

“ No,” answered Oliver. “ I’m only an amateur, and a very poor one. But——”

He stopped, with a start, for he had just become aware of someone standing close behind him looking at his version of Clytie. So quietly had the interloper come in that not a sound had betrayed him. He was a short, sleek young man with a round, clean-shaven face and a pink and white complexion. A brown velvet jacket, a very pale green silk necktie clasped by a diamond ring, and patent leather shoes, caught the eye at once. Arthur started too.



“ Good evening, Mount,” he said. “ Those foxy slippers of yours are a perfect nuisance. Why don’t you follow the burglars and wear black list at once ? Vanelli’s sitting. You won’t care for him. I didn’t know you were coming to-night.”

Oliver noticed two things. Though the words were familiar, there was yet an unmistakable note of deference in the tone. Also, he was not introduced ; indeed, Kildene moved away towards the platform. Mount, however, stopped where he was.

“ I don’t mind Vanelli,” he said, “ only he always reeks of garlic. I’ll tell you what,” he added, turning to Oliver with a delightful smile : “ if you’d let me, I’d awfully like to make a little sketch of you as you are at work on Clytie. You’re an amateur, aren’t you ? ”

Oliver laughed, and looked at his drawing.

“ It’s pretty obvious,” he answered.

“ Yes, it is, but not only in the way you mean. It’s a bit out of drawing still, though I can see Kildene’s line—you haven’t quite got it, old man,” he said, calling to Arthur. “ But ”—he addressed Oliver again—“ you’ve got a—a—well, I hate the word, but there’s no other—you’ve got a feeling that the regular art student often misses.”

“ I’d better introduce your model,” Arthur interposed, coming back. “ Mr. Oliver Grimwood, Mr. Geoffrey Mount. Mount’s a lovely draughtsman, but the less said about his morals the better.”

To Oliver’s surprise, Mount made no protest, but smiled, and answered carelessly,

“I don’t think your worst enemy has ever accused you of being a Galahad, Kildene, so you’d better leave my morals alone.”

“What next, I wonder!” exclaimed Arthur, but Oliver fancied he could detect a certain embarrassment in his manner. Vanelli, however, came out from the dressing-room, and the leader of the class busied himself in posing the model.

Oliver, who had expected to see a model dressed up in some picturesque costume, was astonished and a little scandalised to see the bare-skinned young Italian take up his stand on the platform with an almost bovine calmness and indifference. The strong light from the shaded gas burners fell on the soft, olive-tinted skin that made the Clytie look cold and stiff. For some reason that he could not explain, this Vanelli, who in clothes had looked a very poor object, now, unclothed, seemed the symbol of a new outlook, of emancipation, of a new meaning and significance in life. As he turned back to his drawing, he felt his heart swell with a strange emotion of pride and joy. He was striking out for himself, at last, and before him—still half-hidden—beckoned all manner of wonderful and beautiful things.

“Can you get a little more round?” asked Mount. “The light will be just as good for you, and ever so much better for me. Thanks; that’s just right. Now, work away as if I were at Timbuctoo. Ah, there’s Campbell—he’s the industrious apprentice of the art schools, and

very proud of it too. He's not a bad chap, though, and he's got a rare good eye. Well, I declare! It never rains but it pours. Here's the illustrious Hector Camroux! Why, we're almost all here except the festive Sanday, who's probably conducting a prayer-meeting at Peckham Rye. Good evening, Chevalier."

Camroux nodded and smiled.

"I don't know when I've seen you here, at this time," he said. "Aren't you well?"

"Just recovering from a fit of the blues, and this is my repentance."

"I hope it will last longer than usual," answered Camroux, and passed on. Slim and trim, very neatly dressed, spectacled, his dark brown hair and pointed beard close-cropped, he looked more of the doctor than the artist. He spoke with a very slight foreign accent.

"You keep an eye on his board," said Mount. "He's got a lovely line. He and I are the only ones that know anything about drawing, down here, but don't tell Kildene I said so. There! I believe he heard, he's coming round."

As the evening wore on, two others dropped in, so that six easels were set up round the model. While he was resting, Kildene came to Oliver and once more altered the neck line which he first, and Mount afterwards, had criticised.

"It's not at all bad, though," he said. "You must have a try at Vanelli. You'll find it twice the fun, working from the life."

Camroux strolled up and looked at Mount's sketch.



“Very pretty,” he said, “very pretty indeed, but not quite a portrait to my eye.”

Mount was evidently pleased.

“It wasn’t meant to be one,” he answered. “It’s just a study. An idea came into my head—a picture to be called ‘The Novice.’”

“Then there’s nothing to criticise,” said Camroux. “All the same,” he went on, turning to Oliver, “I should keep an eye on him if I were you. If he ever paints the picture, he’ll put a fine blush on your face.”

“I will, by Jove!” exclaimed Mount, as a rich colour flamed on Oliver’s cheeks. “It would be a portrait then.”

## V

The drawing class proved a very important factor in Oliver’s development. From the time of his first visit to the Bungalow, his life, which up to that time had flowed in one steady stream, seemed to divide into two. At home, he was still the quiet, shy, companionable, sweet-tempered boy whom Mrs. Bannock felt she knew like a book from cover to cover. Away from home, at the Bungalow and with the friends he had found there, a new Oliver was emerging, with new ideas, new tastes, and a new outlook on life. The novelty of this outlook was not its only or its chief attraction. Something in the boy’s nature seemed marvellously responsive to the fresh stimulus. Warmth and colour,

passion and adventure, had suddenly swum into his ken, and he stretched out both hands to welcome them. In this revelation—for such it seemed to him—Mount's friendliness was one of the outstanding features. Usually languid and supercilious, this spoilt child of the studios had, from the first, gone out of his way to make friends with Oliver. For one thing, the unusual delicacy of the sensitive face appealed to his keen, beauty-loving eye. Then the boy's *naïveté* and child-like air of innocence amused the young artist whom no one would have accused of either. As a matter of fact, Oliver—in mind, at any rate—was by no means so innocent as he appeared to be, but his instinctive and defensive duplicity was more than a match for Mount's cynicism, as it had been for Mrs. Bannock's affectionate solicitude. Only Martin had an inkling of the truth, and he told his sister roundly that Oliver was not the namby-pamby babe she thought him. "There's plenty of red blood in his veins," he declared, "too much, I know, to let him be made a parson's pet. He'll be a man's man before he's done, and he's further on the way than you've any idea of."

Mrs. Bannock only smiled. Why should she allow herself to be upset? Dear Oliver had never had a secret from her since he was six.

Whatever he might be in mind, in knowledge of life he was still a veritable child, and Geoffrey Mount found it a new and entertaining experience to introduce his novice gradually into what he looked upon as real life. At first

they met only at the Bungalow, where Mount helped him with his drawing far more than did Kildene himself. Under his tuition, Oliver soon began to make rapid progress, and in six weeks' time was drawing from the life as a matter of course. Mount was immensely tickled at the obvious amazement and the blushes with which the novice greeted Mademoiselle Julie when that amiable young person honoured the Bungalow by sitting there for the altogether. Still more amusing did he find the pretexts under cover of which Oliver excused himself from setting up his easel in the semi-circle round her. He wanted to try the "Slave." He had a bit of a headache, and the light round the model made it worse. He was doubtful whether he would be able to come down much that week, and it was no good beginning a study that you couldn't finish.

"And you'd rather draw her in an overall and goloshes, wouldn't you?" asked Mount, and chuckled to see the blush deepen on the boy's face.

It was soon after this that Mount asked him to come one evening to his rooms.

"Leave your easel for one evening," he said. "You'll work all the better the next night. I've got one or two nice chaps coming. I'm sure you'll like them."

Again Oliver raised a fine crop of excuses, but Mount brushed them all aside, and at last Oliver agreed to come. He took the precaution to say at home that he might be a little later than usual.



“ Oh, Oliver ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Bannock anxiously, “ don’t stay out late. The nights are getting very cold, and coming out of a heated room you might easily get a bad chill. But I won’t go to bed till you come in.”

“ Rubbish ! ” exclaimed Martin. “ Night air’s the purest and the best. You’ve got a latchkey, haven’t you, Oliver ? ”

“ No, father,” said Oliver.

“ I’ll have one cut for you, to-day. And I never go to bed till 11 o’clock. If you’re later than that, you’ll have to knock me up. No—you can take my key.”

And he handed it over.

“ But I’m sure Oliver won’t be as late as 11 o’clock,” said Mrs. Bannock

“ I won’t be later, any way,” said Oliver, looking at his father.

## VI

Geoffrey Mount had rooms on the ground floor in Bernard Street, Russell Square, and very comfortable rooms they were. A good deal of the furniture belonged to his landlord, and, in itself, was heavy and ugly. But he had added two or three chairs and a curved mahogany bureau, and these, as well as the rugs and curtains, were chosen with such taste that the whole effect was as delightful as it was unusual. So, at any rate, Oliver found it, the first time he accepted Mount’s invitation.

He went hoping and expecting to meet some rising young artists, but of the two men to whom he was introduced, one was a stock-jobber and the other in the tea trade. The jobber was a short, fat young man with a big face, but small and rather pretty features, which looked to Oliver as though they belonged to someone else. He had a trick of constantly fondling and stroking one hand with the other, a trick which, intentionally or not, advertised the fact that they were beautifully shaped and very white. The tea man was also plump and short, but not quite so fat, and a good inch taller. His hair and eyes were raven black, and nose and mouth proclaimed him of Abraham's seed.

Mount in his velvet jacket and green tie introduced the jobber as Mr. Bateman, and the other as Mr. Lipstein.

"Mount has just been telling us," said Bateman, talking very fast and with a curious mincing manner of speech, "that you are an amateur with great taste for the fine arts. That's very interesting to me, because I, frankly, don't understand or appreciate drawing or painting in the very least. Now, if you can convert me and make me see the error of my ways, I shall be eternally grateful."

"I wouldn't advise Mr. Grimwood to try," remarked Lipstein. "It would take two or three eternities to argue the question with you."

"I'm no good at arguing," said Oliver, "and I don't want to be converted. Besides, I don't see how you can argue about matters of taste."

"Ah, there I don't agree with you," exclaimed Bateman eagerly. "What we call taste depends largely upon knowledge. If, for instance, you know anatomy, you can appreciate certain features in a statue."

"The jaw, for example," put in Lipstein.

"Or the nose," countered Bateman. "Mount, here, showed me, in one of his saucy artistic anatomy books, a muscle that goes from the calf to the ankle. Well, now, whenever I see a nude picture or statue I look at once for this muscle. Do you work from the life?" he asked, turning to Oliver.

"Rather!" Mount answered for him. "He's hard at work on Mademoiselle Julie now."

"You must find it very interestin'," remarked Lipstein with a laugh that made Oliver flush scarlet.

"Why should he find it interesting?" asked Bateman with the air of an anxious inquirer.

"It would take too long to make you understand, wouldn't it, Grimwood?" said Mount. "Let's have a game. Now then, name your drink—beer or fizz, Bateman?"

"Fizz, I think, if you're going to open a bottle."

"You're beer, I know," said Mount, turning to Lipstein.

"Quite right. Beer's malt and hops, but what fizz may be, the Lord only knows."

"And you, Grimwood?"

Oliver hesitated. At home he hardly ever touched either beer or wine. At Christmas and



on birthdays Mrs. Bannock and he had a glass each of port, which Martin took regularly at dinner, three glasses of it: one during dinner itself, one with the dessert, and one to sweeten the coffee: a barbarous conjunction, this last, which caused Mrs. Bannock acute distress. It had always been a stock joke that Oliver's glass unloosened his tongue, and Martin, in one of his rare waggish moods, had solemnly warned him not to drink port within an hour before signing a contract. Now, however, he fancied that everyone was watching him and ready to laugh at his innocence. So, with a very creditable assumption of indifference, he answered:

"Oh, I don't mind. I don't know that I want anything. A drop of fizz, please."

It was his first introduction to champagne, and he found it unexpectedly pleasant. But he remembered the joke against him at home, and resolved to be sternly reticent.

The game was Loo, and the gambling was extremely mild. Oliver was a novice, but the luck favoured him, and at the end of an hour's play he was fifteen shillings to the good. Then Mount walked across to the piano, which stood in a corner of the room.

"Here, Bat," he said, "let's have a song. Did you bring that album?"

"Yes, I left it in the hall. But someone will have to play the accompaniment; it's a bit too up-and-down for me."

"You try, Mount," said Lipstein, who had fetched the music in.

Mount glanced at a page or two.

"No, thanks," he answered. "Old Hundredth and the Vesper Hymn are my limit. What about you, Grimwood?"

Oliver had been looking over his shoulder. The wine must have given him courage.

"I'll try, if you like," he said. "You mustn't mind if I break down."

"But he will," remarked Lipstein. "He hates being made to look ridiculous."

"That's why I'm rather shy of going about with you," answered Bateman, and Oliver struck the first notes of the accompaniment.

It was one of Schumann's songs, and Bateman sang it in an unusually fine tenor voice and with a taste and feeling that astonished Oliver. The others, however, had evidently known what to expect, and they were more complimentary to the accompanist than to the vocalist.

"Absolutely tip-top," exclaimed Lipstein. "Benedict couldn't do it better. Let's have something without the voice."

"Something with the fiddle, he means," said Bateman. "It's somewhere in the hall, I bet."

"You've lost," answered Lipstein. "I thought I'd give you a holiday, so I left it at home."

"Then you're sickening for something," said Bateman.

Mount struck in.

"Do you know any Chopin?" he asked Oliver. "He's my man. Not too brutally healthy. Just a touch of the hectic."

So Oliver played a mazurka and then a noc-

turne, and was so much applauded that he began to be afraid they were laughing at him, but when he went away, Mount, who let him out, repeated his thanks with what seemed such obvious earnestness that he was at once astonished, pleased, and even a little touched.

“I dare say you’ll think me silly, or that I’m putting it on, but the fact is, I’m gone on music—especially Chopin—and you gave me a real treat. I wish I hadn’t asked those bounders, but you must come again soon. I’ve got a good many sides to me, and you’ve turned a decent one to the light.”

## VII

“Martin,” said Mrs. Bannock one evening, “I’m afraid I’ve done wrong, but I really didn’t know how to get out of it, it was so awkward, and, as a matter of fact, he really asked himself.”

Mr. Grimwood happened to be in a good humour, and he was tickled by his sister’s obvious discomposure. Indeed, he had detected signs of uneasiness as far back as the first course at dinner.

“If you’ll just give me some faint idea of what you’re talking about,” he replied, “I’ll soon tell you whether you’ve done wrong.”

“It’s Mr. Trotter I’m thinking of. I know you don’t like the clergy, but, of course, Oliver and I go to church regularly, and the sittings are taken in your name, and the vicar’s been very kind to Oliver—he’s been to dinner there



several times, and, of course, Mr. Trotter isn't quite like an ordinary clergyman. His wife is a niece of Lord Chardleigh, and they live in very good style."

Logic was not one of Mrs. Bannock's strong points, but she had developed a sensitiveness to Martin's weak points, which sometimes stood her in good stead.

"Well, well," he said, "what's the trouble? Do you want me to find him a nose-bag?"

The tone, if not the pleasantry itself, came as a relief to the good lady, who had feared an explosion.

"If you're going out any evening, I dare say we could fix on that. It would be easy to make an excuse."

Here again Mrs. Bannock was happily inspired. Martin did not seriously think that she wanted him out of the way, but the vaguest, faintest suggestion of such a possibility was enough to bring him into the field.

"Who the devil asked you to make any excuse?" he inquired, but the words were much rougher than the manner. "If my mutton's good enough for His Reverence, so am I. As for wine, I admit that the clergy are good judges of that, but I'll bet you anything in reason, I can give him a better glass of wine than he can give me."

A fortnight later, as a result of this conversation, Martin Grimwood had the honour, if not exactly the pleasure, of entertaining at dinner

the Rev. Cornelius and the Honourable Mrs. Trotter. Of the two, the lady was by far the more imposing—a tall, handsome woman, with a fine, regular, unintelligent face. Her dress, rich but sober, seemed to say: “This will show you what I could do, if the rules of the game permitted.” The Rev. Cornelius was a spare man of the middle height, clean shaven, good-looking, with the unmistakable air of the ‘varsity about him. His manner, suave and tolerant, suggested a certain amount of strength in reserve.

Martin and Oliver were in evening-dress. It was one of Martin’s weaknesses that he liked wearing the mail of society. It was not merely that it gave him confidence and reminded him of the distance he had travelled since the days of his youth. He took an actual, childlike pleasure in “dressing-up,” as he called it. He would stand before his dressing-table glass for quite a long time, admiring the cut of his coat, the fit of his shirt, and the superb gloss on his collar and cuffs. But if he admired himself under these conditions, still more did he admire his son. Indeed, the boy did look handsome, and as Martin watched him at the dinner-table, he felt almost grateful to the vicar for having invited himself.

His gratitude, however, did not take the form of conversational complaisance.

“Things look black, don’t they?” remarked Mr. Trotter, after he had complied with Mrs. Bannock’s invitation to say grace.

Martin understood his meaning, but the grace rankled, and he was angry with himself for having bowed his head.

"It doesn't mean rain or thunder," he said. "I expect we shall have a fine night."

"I hope so," answered the vicar, "but I was not thinking of the weather. I was thinking of our political and social conflicts."

"It would be a funny world if everyone thought alike," said Martin.

"Quite so. That's past praying for, I'm afraid. But don't you think the violence of political controversy is much to be deplored? Look at the papers."

"I don't see much the matter with them; they give you what you want. If they don't, you change about till you find the stuff you like. You fancy *The Standard*, I expect, and I swear by *Reynolds*'."

"Oh, Martin!" protested Mrs. Bannock, "you *can't* like that horrid paper."

"What do you think I take it in for, then?" he demanded.

"To avoid being taken in yourself, perhaps," suggested the vicar.

"Quite right," exclaimed Martin. "But there are lots of people who like being taken in. They'll pay threepence a day and think it dirt cheap at the price."

"I hear the *Times* circulation has never recovered that Piggott business," the vicar remarked.

"And I hope it never will," said Martin



loudly. "Dishonesty's bad, stupidity's worse, but the two together are quite insufferable."

"I'm afraid you're a dreadful Radical, Mr. Grimwood," said Mrs. Trotter. "I dare say you believe in old Gladstone."

"He's all right as far as he goes, but he doesn't go far enough."

Mrs. Trotter lowered her voice to a thrilling whisper.

"Mr. Grimwood, the man's a Jesuit! I know it for a fact, through my aunt, Lady Chardleigh."

"Is he? Well, old Salisbury's a Mormon. I know *that*, for a fact. And you should see what *Reynolds'* has to say about the Prince of Wales—all facts, mind you."

"Have the mothers had their outing yet, Mr. Trotter?" asked Mrs. Bannock hastily, and the conversation was soon safely anchored to parish work, and the relative merits of Clacton, South-end, and Bricket Woods.

When Mrs. Trotter and Mrs. Bannock had retired, the vicar accepted another glass of port and a very prepossessing cigar.

"I'm afraid you're a sad tempter, Mr. Grimwood," he remarked amiably, for he was a good judge of wine and tobacco.

"I don't believe in temptation," answered Martin. "It's only a fool's way of trying to shirk his responsibility. If a man's strong, he can laugh at it; if he's weak, he'd come a cropper without it."

"But, Father," said Oliver, half hesitant, half eager, "suppose a man's neither strong nor

weak, but something between the two—what then ? ”

Martin looked up, and the surly expression with which he had confronted the vicar, melted into a smile.

“ Well,” he answered, “ in that case, perhaps, he had better go to church.”

In the drawing-room, Oliver himself was the chief subject of conversation.

“ What a very nice looking young man your nephew is,” said Mrs. Trotter.

“ He’s a dear boy. His father and I are both of us wrapped up in him. He’s got such a sweet disposition, you can’t help loving him.”

“ He looks a little delicate, doesn’t he ? ”

“ As a child he was a great anxiety. At one time we thought he’d never make a man. But he’s got over it wonderfully, and now he really has very good health.”

“ I think it must be his complexion,” said Mrs. Trotter. “ If he were a girl, people would rave about it.”

“ You can’t offend him more than by telling him he’s like a girl. But there’s a refinement and purity about his mind that many a modern girl might envy.”

“ I’m afraid that couldn’t be said of many modern men.”

“ Well, you see, the circumstances were peculiar. Being so delicate, he needed constant care, so, from quite a little boy he was always with me. He tells me everything. I really don’t believe he’s ever hid a secret from me.”

“That’s a good deal more than I can say of my Gerald, and he’s only twelve.”

And Gerald’s peccadilloes kept the ball rolling till the gentlemen came in.

### VIII

A few weeks after the vicar’s visit, Oliver mentioned at dinner one evening, in quite a casual way, that the next night he should probably be a bit late. Since he had been entrusted with a latch-key, his hours had become more elastic, until Mrs. Bannock had given up her habit of stopping out of bed in order to let him in. She still disliked late hours, and held that all the lights in the house ought to be out by half-past ten. But she was now so sure of Oliver that she felt hardly a twinge of anxiety, though, in any case, her fear of Martin’s tongue would have kept her own sealed.

“Is it anything special?” she asked.

“Nothing much,” he answered carelessly—so, at least, it seemed. “They’re having a supper, and they’ve asked me.”

Both Mrs. Bannock and Martin assumed that the supper was to be at the Bungalow. As a matter of fact, it was held at a much less reputable place.

“I’ve got you an invitation to a unique sort of entertainment,” Mount had told Oliver. “It’s Friday week, and you mustn’t miss it on any account.”



“Mustn’t I? All right. Only, you know, I can’t be very late.”

“You can get away as soon as you like. We’re to be at Chelsea about nine. There’ll be some dancing, and they’ll go down on their knees to you to play the piano for them. I told them you were a second Liszt.”

“Who are the ‘they’?”

“Well, one’s a cousin of Bateman. Bat’s pretty hot, but this chap is a real scorcher. He calls himself a critic, and he’s certainly got one qualification—he can’t draw or paint for toffee. He’s got any amount of tin and almost as much brass, and he runs a chap named Paris. Paris *can* draw, but if he isn’t mad he’s not far off the line. They’re both of them absolutely unconventional—you know what I mean—and their little parties are the most interesting things of the kind in London. This isn’t a party, but it’s sure to be worth going to—the men themselves are worth the cab fare.”

By this time Oliver was sufficiently an initiate to understand what was covered by the word “unconventional.” He had, indeed, proved a wonderfully apt pupil, and Mount himself had been astonished at the ease with which the shy, cotton-wool-nurtured boy had adapted himself to conditions that at first must have been, and were, startling, if not horrifying. It was this easy accommodation that soothed Mount’s conscience when, at rare intervals, it grew mutinous. “He’s born to eat forbidden fruit,” he said to himself at such times, “and if I hadn’t shown

him the way to the tree, he'd have found it for himself."

No one, certainly, looking in that evening at No. 7 Westover Studios would have thought that the handsome, bright-eyed young fellow rattling out the tunes for the Comus band of dancers was a scrupulously regular church-goer with a spotless home reputation for innocence and purity.

Yet the difference between him and the rest of the company was clear enough on the surface. Bateman's cousin, Arthur Cutlin, was a big, coarse-made, coarse-featured, coarse-complexioned man, who was said to be thirty, but looked at least ten years older. Arnold Paris was a strange contrast, a lamp-post of a boy, white-faced, with a thin, high, aquiline nose, and great black eyes. Cutlin wore a suit of rough tweed, while Paris stalked about in a brown velvet dressing-gown with lapels, cuffs, and a girdle, all of white silk. Lipstein and two other men were in evening-dress, while Mount and Oliver were commonplace in blue serge.

As for the women, they were all, with one exception, in evening-dress, and the display of necks and shoulders was lavish. Mademoiselle Julie was conspicuous, talking and laughing in her high-pitched voice with even more than her usual vivacity. Her complexion had received attention, and was quite brilliant. On a settee by the fireplace, sat a huge woman, enormously fat, and inconceivably grotesque in plain white muslin, with what looked like a child's coral

necklace round her massive throat. On her broad face rested a placid, good-humoured expression that seemed strangely out of harmony with her surroundings.

The studio was a long and rather narrow room, the walls covered with thin brown paper, not pasted on flat in the usual way, but arranged in longitudinal strips fastened to each other at the overlap, so as to suggest a continuous series of fluttering frills. The room was lighted by three standard lamps, the globes covered by coloured shades. At one end was a large table on which were arranged a number of cups round a brass coffee-urn. There were also wine-glasses of all sizes and shapes and a number of small, curiously-shaped decanters with liqueurs and spirits, as well as a profusion of cakes and sweets. Behind the table waited a demure elderly woman in rusty black, with a huge jet brooch and, at each ear, a bunch of iron-grey curls.

As Mount and Oliver made their entry, Cutlin came forward to meet them.

"Ah, good evening, Geoff," he drawled. "Glad to see you and your friend too. This is Mr. Grimwood—the English Liszt—I presume?"

And he held out a limp hand for Oliver to shake.

"I don't know what lies Mount has been telling," said Oliver, quite at his ease, "but the truth is, I can just strum a little, to amuse myself."

"I hope you'll let us share your amusement," answered Cutlin. "Help yourselves over there, will you, Mount, you know this crowd. Tell



your friend all about us, and tear our characters to bits."

"It's an impossibility," said a deep, slow, tired voice from behind Oliver, who started to find Paris so close.

Mount laughed.

"You mean you can't slander what doesn't exist. Well then, I'll tell him the truth. Will that satisfy you?"

"Character," wailed the melancholy bass, "is an innocent self-deception; the truth is an obvious absurdity."

Cutlin looked up eagerly.

"Now, how do you make that out, old man?" he asked, and looked round as if inviting attention to the oracle.

"Your truth is what you see," it declared, "and to me it is a lie. My truth is what I see, and to everyone else it is worse than a lie, it is ridiculous."

"St. Cecilia, for instance," said Mount.

"Yes," answered Paris eagerly, "and yet she will be worshipped when your beastly academic nudes are pulped and forgotten."

"Then she needn't be in a hurry about setting up her altar," retorted Mount, and, linking his arm with Oliver's, led him to the table.

They asked for coffee, and to Mount's the elderly attendant added a generous nip of cognac. Oliver's cup she filled with coffee alone.

Mount laughed.

"There's discrimination!" he said. "Why shouldn't he have a drop?"

“ You’ve begun to need it and he hasn’t,” she answered in a dull, indifferent voice, and turned away as if there were no more to be said.

“ Damned impertinence ! ” exclaimed Mount with a most unusual flash of ill-temper. “ I wonder where Cutlin picked up that old effigy. I expect she’s been taking her share.”

While they were sipping their coffee, a short, red-haired man with twinkling eyes walked to the middle of the room and, without any introduction, began to talk rapidly in French.

“ It’s Gaston,” whispered Mount. “ He *is* half French. This is one of his studio yarns. He’s got the slang and all. Not one in ten understands what it’s all about. Cutlin does, and Julie. Watch her, and laugh when she tries to blush.”

Oliver rather prided himself on his French, but the slang soon beat him and he lost his bearings hopelessly. But he watched Julie, and was rewarded, not by a blush, but by the high, shrill laugh that told him, and a good many others, when to follow suit.

“ Now for a waltz,” said Cutlin, when the recitation was over, beckoning Oliver to the piano. “ There’s a lot of music there. *Faust* goes well. Play pretty fast, please. They seem to have got ice-bound.”

So Oliver struck up *Faust*, and the next moment four couples were whirling round. It was not very decorous dancing, but there was no doubt as to the melting of the ice. “ Faster ! ” Cutlin called, and “ Vite ! Vite ! Monsieur

Oliver," cried Julie. Cheeks were flushing, eyes sparkling, skirts flying.

Oliver glanced round the room as he played, and smiled as he saw the fat woman beaming tranquilly from her settee like an over-full moon. Leaning against the mantelpiece was Paris, watching the dancers with an expression of the deepest gloom. And behind the table at the far end of the room he caught a glimpse of the curl-flanked face, and huge jet brooch, and rusty black dress.

"I'm done!" exclaimed Mount's partner, throwing herself on a chair after one last prodigious whirl that would have paralysed Mrs. Grundy and startled less scrupulous people.

"That's the waltz as it *should* be danced," said Lipstein, wiping his brow. "Not the silly anæmic parade step of the ordinary ball-room. But it does make one hot—and thirsty," he added with an eye on the liqueurs.

"It's awfully good of you to play for us," said Cutlin, coming to the piano. "You worked that up splendidly. I could see Paris was delighted, though he has his own way of manifesting his pleasure."

"Yes, he has," remarked Mount, who had joined them. "No one would guess that he was thinking of anything but how to commit suicide."

"That's not a bad shot for a superficial mind," said Cutlin, who evidently resented Mount's attitude towards his idol. "I've persuaded him to do the Danse Macabre with Miss Schimpf."

"Oh, good Heavens!" exclaimed Mount,



“ we’re in luck’s way. This is worth coming for. Miss Schimpf over there, Grimwood, is Paris’s ideal woman. He’s painted her as ‘St. Cecilia with a Banjo,’ as ‘Venus rising out of the Regent’s Canal,’ and as ‘The Woman with the Hoop.’ You must get him to show you them.”

“ He will be delighted, I am sure, if you approach him in a sympathetic spirit. He has the sensitiveness of genius. Now I wonder whether you’d play this Danse Macabre for him. It was composed by Villiers.”

“ He *did* blow his brains out, didn’t he ? ” asked Mount.

“ He drank Hemlock,” answered Cutlin, very shortly.

“ Oh yes, of course—the carbolic brand ; I remember.”

“ Here it is,” said Cutlin, producing a sheet of music.

Oliver glanced at it.

“ It looks queer,” he said, “ but not unreasonably hard. I’ll have a try, if you like.”

“ Thanks very much,” whispered Cutlin, and made a sign with his hand.

Immediately, two of the three lamps were turned down. Lipstein and another man went out, and in a moment came back, carrying between them a large open coffin, black outside, and lined with white satin. This gruesome burden they laid down on the floor in the middle of the room.

Paris, who was still leaning against the mantelpiece, now stood up, unfastened his girdle, and

let his velvet dressing-gown fall to the ground. Beneath it, he was clad in black silk long-sleeved vest and tights, on which the outlines of the bones were traced in white that matched the ghastly pallor of his complexion. Very deliberately, he walked across to Miss Schimpf, bowed low, and offered his arm. She rose and, escorted by him, advanced to the coffin, where they stood facing each other, motionless, one on one side of it, the other on the other.

Then rose the slow, weird discords and the fantastic rhythms of the *Danse Macabre*. The tall, lean body began to bend and sway, the long arms moved very deliberately backwards, forwards, and sideways, as if weaving magic spells, the thin legs postured like a dancing-master's, on their pointed toes. There was something ghastly and sinister about the half-closed eyes, the thin, sharp-cut nose, and the white, smooth skin tight-drawn over the temples, cheek-bones, and chin.

And on the other side of the coffin, Miss Schimpf, her huge body mocked and ridiculed—so it seemed to Oliver—by the white muslin frock, followed the movements of her repulsive partner, arm for arm, leg for leg, the bland, capacious smile never wavering all the time. Suddenly the music quickened and with it Paris's grotesque evolutions. Too swiftly now for her to follow, he darted hither and thither, catching hold of her and twisting his arms and legs round her, lithe as a contortionist. His eyes opened wide and glared like one possessed. His actions took on more and more the appearance

of hostility. Beneath her fixed and resolute smile an expression of fear began to show. The meaning of it all flashed into Oliver's mind as he played the strange music and caught glimpses of the actors. This was the eternal struggle between Death and Life—Death the hideous, relentless, exultant conqueror; Life, the helpless, gross, contemptible victim. The sight filled him with anger, loathing, and a kind of emotional nausea. He stopped playing before the end. Paris paid no heed. His bony fingers were round the woman's throat. He pressed her to her knees, then on her back upon the floor. Her face was crimson, her eyes stared wildly, her fat hands tore at his fingers. She uttered a strange, harsh cry. With one last lightning movement, he released her and flung himself into the open coffin. Mount and two other men lifted it and carried him out.

Cutlin came up and raised Miss Schimpf. She looked both scared and angry, but he whispered in her ear and she let herself be led back to her settee.

"Nevare again," she declared agitatedly. "It is too bat. He is what you call off his het. Nevare again."

A moment after, Paris returned, still in his tights, and was loudly applauded. His face wore its old gloomy, bored expression as he picked up his dressing-gown, put it on, and resumed his former attitude against the mantelpiece.

When Miss Schimpf had been comforted with a tankard of lager beer, Lipstein stepped out



into the middle with his violin. The lamps were turned up and he drew the bow across the strings.

At the first note an astonishing thing happened. The quiet little frump behind the refreshment table put one hand on it and vaulted up with the agility of a trained gymnast. She tore off the brooch and threw it on the floor. The black bodice and skirt followed, and were joined, a moment later, by the iron-grey wig with its clustered curls. Instead of the prim old woman, a girl was disclosed in the full, bold beauty of young womanhood. Her hair and eyes were black as night, her features, not coldly classical, were both strong and delicate, and her expression was friendly and vivacious. Her brilliant scarlet dress, terribly low and short, showed off a beautiful figure. Oliver caught a rippling whisper of surprise and pleasure—"Nesta Somervil!" Lipstein stopped, Cutlin clapped his hands loudly, even Paris smiled.

Then the violin struck up a merry, sparkling tune and the girl began to dance, a dance, in its way, as strange and wonderful as Paris's contortions. In and out, among all the fragile glasses and decanters, her little feet touched and twinkled, doubling on the white cloth the scales and turns and shakes and arpeggios of the violin. "Ah, *this* is life," Oliver said to himself, remembering the Danse Macabre: "real, glorious life!" Then the violin stopped, and the dancer sprang lightly to the floor. It seemed to the boy only a moment, but when he looked at his watch he was horrified.

“ Good Heavens ! ” he whispered to Mount, “ I must slip off at once. I’d no idea it was that time.”

“ Won’t you speak to Nesta ? ” asked Mount.

“ No, I mustn’t stop a minute longer,” he answered, and let himself out, while everyone was crowding round the star of the evening.

## IX

That night Oliver went home in a state of great excitement. Hitherto he had found the stolen waters very sweet. Often, indeed, when they were out of reach, he had paid for his pleasure by moments of bitter remorse. At such times he had registered solemn vows that never, never would he sip again. He had written these vows in black and white, he had spoken them on his knees. But, sooner or later, temptation—generally wearing one of Mount’s Bond Street suits—had beckoned, and he had yielded.

It was his misfortune that the tempter should be such a man as Mount. Sin that was coarse and coarsely practised repelled him. But Mount, whatever his faults, was not coarse in manner. He was as neat and dainty in his vices as in his dress. He broke the commandments—one or two of them, at any rate—freely, but demurely, almost caressingly, and he referred to the breakages with a quaint touch of humour that Oliver found irresistible. And he was genuinely fond

of the boy, whose good looks, pleasant manners, girlish shyness, and air of naïve innocence all delighted him. He was proud of the novice whom he was initiating into the mysteries of which he considered himself a High Priest.

But to-night the novice had received a shock, and the stolen waters were bitter in his mouth as the waters of Marah. Something—he could not yet say specifically what—had jarred upon him, and suddenly he felt that the double life he was leading was hateful. The whole atmosphere of the studio had been vile. Cutlin was an educated baboon. Paris ought to be in an asylum. Julie was a forward minx. Miss Schimpf was a monstrosity. Lipstein was just what Mount had called him—a bounder. And Mount himself—there Oliver paused. Mount had been exceedingly pleasant and hospitable; he was marvelously clever, and seemed able to do with no apparent effort what other men could accomplish only by unremitting toil and strain. His last Academy picture had pleased the critics immensely, and, what was still more important, had sold within a fortnight. Rushbrook the dealer had taken him up. His pastels were already in great demand. He had—there could be no doubt about it—distinctly arrived.

And yet—much as he admired him—Oliver knew in his heart of hearts that he was really a dirty-minded little scamp. “So am I,” he added immediately, yet he was conscious of a difference, though he could not define it. As a matter of fact, there was a great difference. Mount had



already evolved a theory of life, which legalised his pleasures, and he lived up—or down—to it. Oliver's theory of life was largely conventional, but—such as it was—it scourged him for every transgression.

More than once, Oliver had taken his friend home, and Mrs. Bannock had been charmed with the young artist. Martin, however, in spite of the deep respect he always felt for success, mistrusted him.

“He's fast,” he said afterwards to Oliver. “I don't think any the worse of a young fellow for stretching the traces a bit. I wasn't exactly a saint myself when I was his age,” he added, “but there are different ways of being fast, and his is the way I don't fancy.”

To-night, for some reason, the thought of his own duplicity was heavy upon Oliver. There were times when he almost admired the ease with which he lived his double life. But now his mind travelled back to the days of his childhood, and there he saw the same fatal weakness. He had never been bold and straight and fearless as so many boys were. Even when he was quite small, he had been timid and cunning. How frightened he used to be of the dark, and what excuses he made to hide his fear! Why, it was about that very thing he had lied to the girl who used to be so kind to him at old Arkwright's—Sophie—what was her name?

As he reached this point, he suddenly realised what had sent him burrowing into the past. It was a gleam in the dark eyes, and the fearless

expression on the face of Nesta Somervil that had, by some curious link of association, recalled Sophie Zanetti—oh yes, of course, that was the name !

## X

“ Your father doesn’t look at all well, Mr. Oliver,” said Pringle one morning.

Oliver was sitting at what used to be Pringle’s table. He would never have thought of dispossessing the original occupier, but Martin had arranged it over his head. Pringle had transferred his frock coat and dazzling linen to the other table. Dick, the office boy, almost as glorious in gilt buttons, had been given a small table close to the door which it was one of his duties to open and close, while Jevons had retired into the back room now converted into a comfortable second office.

“ He’s got a nasty cold,” Oliver answered, as he took off his coat and hung it up.

“ I’ve noticed it for some time,” Pringle persisted. His eyes look different, and he’s got a sort of tremble when he walks.”

“ He hasn’t complained of anything much lately,” said Oliver, and began opening the letters.

By this time he had fairly mastered the ordinary office routine. Martin’s building transactions were now on quite a large scale, and what with selling, letting, and arranging and paying off mortgages, there was always plenty of work

in the office. In spite of the multiplicity of his business interests, Martin had hitherto managed to keep the strings of the Duke Street concern pretty well in his own hands. Just lately, however, he had found himself obliged to leave a great deal to Pringle, and even Oliver had felt constrained to do more than usual.

"Here's another long letter about Cavendish Street," he said after a pause. "It looks to me as if they want to get out of it. Just look at the things they want done."

He held out a paper, and Mr. Pringle came across to take it. He then established himself on the rug in front of the fire, spread his legs and read the requisitions.

"Well," demanded Oliver, "what do you say to that?"

"Oh, preposterous!" answered Mr. Pringle. "Why, those extras would come to £150 at least, and he's only taking it for five years."

"Well"—Oliver took up his pen—"what would you say?"

"Why not suggest meeting him at the house to discuss the matter?"

Oliver made a grimace.

"No thank you! Why, he'd talk me over in five minutes."

"Not he," answered Mr. Pringle. "It's only a question of a little practice. It's just as easy to speak what you want to say, as to write it."

"Oh no, it isn't," said Oliver. "Your paper doesn't blush, and your pen doesn't stammer, and the ink doesn't contradict itself."



“ You’d do it as well as anybody, in a very little while,” Mr. Pringle declared, “ but if you like, I’ll go.”

“ Yes, that’ll be best,” said Oliver eagerly. “ Give me two or three dates, and I’ll write and make the appointment.”

That evening Oliver watched his father with unusual care, and soon came to the conclusion that Pringle was not far wrong. Martin seemed to have lost a great deal of that rough, self-assertive manner which had always been one of his characteristics. Even his way of carrying himself had changed. Oliver wondered that it had not struck him before, how limp his father’s attitudes had become. He noticed too, almost with dismay, the strange mildness of his few conversational remarks. There were several excellent opportunities of snubbing Mrs. Bannock, but Martin did not avail himself of a single one.

When dinner was over, Oliver stood up to go out of the room. His father rose too, but slowly.

“ Are you going out, Oliver ? ” he asked.

As a matter of fact, Oliver had meant to go to the Bungalow, where his attendance had, of late, been very irregular. Something, however, in Martin’s face and tone made him change his mind.

“ No,” he answered, “ I’m going to write some stupid letters.”

“ Come and talk to a stupid old man, first, then,” said his father, leading the way to his study. “ I won’t keep you long.”

“ There’s a box of those Sullivans you like,” he added, pointing to the mantelpiece. “ I brought it in to-night. Fill me a pipe out of that rack, there’s a good lad—no, not that one—the end but two on the right; it’s his turn. Thanks; now a match.”

As he lighted his Sullivan, Oliver said to himself that this was the first time he could remember his father calling upon him for any little personal service.

For a moment or two, they puffed away in silence. Then, with an obvious effort, Martin leaned forward in his chair and began to talk.

“ Oliver,” he said, and there was a note in his voice that the young man had never heard before. It was not fear, or disappointment, or anger, or tenderness, and yet there seemed a hint, a suggestion of each. “ Oliver, it’s all up with me. Don’t tell your aunt; not yet, anyway. She’s a good woman, but she’ll fuss. They can’t help it. Fussing and petticoats always did go together, and always will. I’ve known for a good long time that there was something wrong with me. I ought to have gone to a doctor, but I hate doctors, and I’m a stingy old hunk—except where you’re concerned ”—he pointed with a wistful little smile, to the box of Sullivans on the mantelpiece. “ So I did what thousands of other silly asses do, I bought Jobson’s pills, and Dobson’s plaster, and Hobson’s mixture, and all the time things were going from bad to worse. At last I did go—to your friend Dr. Vaisey, and he told me what I

had guessed for myself—that I've got about one chance in a hundred—they're very merciful: they always leave you one. I pressed him hard, and at last I found out what I wanted to know—I've got about six months, or perhaps a little more. If I were to drop business at once and lie up like a regular invalid, I might last a bit longer, but it would make no real difference. Well, of course I'm not going to do that. It would be a hundred deaths instead of one. I don't think I mind much, except for one thing. I would have liked to see you settled in life."

Up to this point, Martin had been talking with a good deal of energy. Now, he leaned back, as if tired, and smoked in silence for some little time. Oliver, deeply moved, felt at a loss how to express his sympathy. He knew, of course, that in business, and in private life too, his father was hard, and grasping, and rough-tongued. But that fact had only made more miraculous the unfailing gentleness and generosity with which Martin had treated him. But he felt this treatment as a miracle, not as something normal and beautiful. And this element of strangeness seemed to bar the free, natural intercourse between father and son. Every day he had evidence of Martin's harsh but always shrewd judgments of human nature. Was he—how could he be—blind to his own son's real character? Those were the questions that were constantly in Oliver's mind, that tied his tongue now when he longed to express his gratitude and affection.



Just as he felt the silence growing intolerable, his father began again.

“I want you now to think very carefully what you want, and mean, to do after I am gone. I’m not a millionaire, but I can certainly leave you £50,000 and the business. Now, what about this business? You’ve been a very good boy in sticking to it as you have done, and I believe you could do very well indeed at it if you chose. But the thing is, do you care for it? Don’t say ‘yes’ to please me, because the only thing that pleases me is that you should please yourself.”

He waited for an answer, and Oliver, after a few moments hesitation, said :

“I don’t dislike it at all, but I’m afraid I shall never be much good at it. If it weren’t for Pringle——”

“Oh, Pringle!” Martin interrupted. “I’ve been watching him for some time, till I was quite sure I knew his little game. He’s been useful, and he shall have his due, but not quite what he expects. He thinks that without me you’ll find him indispensable and that he’ll be able to make any terms he likes with you. Now I’m not going to have that, and I’ve got two plans; it’s for you to choose between them. I can set about trying to sell the whole business, building and all, as a going concern. I think I know a man who’d take it on at the price I’d let it go at. That’s if you want to get out of business altogether. The other plan is quite different. If you like, I’ll offer your friend Squires a place in the office with a prospect of a partnership.

He'll do all right—I saw enough of him to know that, and unless I'm very much mistaken, he won't play any tricks. If he were to come, I should soon know for certain; I'd livelong enough for that, if I had to pay all Harley Street to bolster me up. Now, you think it over, and tell me, when you've made up your mind."

"And now," he added, after a slight pause, "I think I'll have a nap, for I feel confoundedly tired."

And Oliver, who was longing to express his sympathy and his gratitude for all his father's goodness, had to go away feeling that—as often before—he had missed an opportunity.

## XI

The next evening, after dinner, Oliver followed his father into the study, and filled his pipe without a word. Then he helped himself to a Sullivan and sat down.

"I've thought over what you said last night, Father," he began.

"Ay! Well?" said Martin, and the young man could tell from the tone of his voice that he was pleased with the little attention.

"I should like to keep on, if Bertie will come in."

Oliver thought he could trace a gleam of satisfaction in his father's eye, but the answer was not demonstrative.

"Very well: I'll write to him to-morrow."

For a minute or two they puffed in silence. Then Oliver began again.

“ Father, you *will* take another opinion about your illness, won’t you ? ”

“ No, Oliver, I won’t,” Martin answered. “ Why should I ? Vaisey’s not a fool—anyone can see that—and there’s no reason why he should tell me lies. Besides, I feel he’s right. And it’s just about time I was snuffed out.”

“ Don’t, Father ! ”

Martin Grimwood smiled, leaned forward, and laid his hand lightly on his son’s knee. It was still a workman’s hand—hard and rough—and as it lay on Oliver’s superfine cloth the contrast struck both of them.

“ You mustn’t take on about it,” Martin said. “ That’s the expression my poor old mother always used to use when there was any trouble ; dear me, how it brings her back and I haven’t thought of her for years ! We’re a heartless lot, Oliver.”

“ Not all of us,” answered Oliver, covering the hand on his knee with his own, soft and shapely.

He looked at his father and could hardly believe his eyes. A tear or two showed plainly on the rugged cheek. Martin brushed them away, but with no sign of discomposure. The smile still lingered on his face.

“ No, not all of us,” he repeated. “ You’ve got a good heart. You’re the very image of your mother, and there never was another like her—except you. You’re a good lad and always have been.”

Oliver had seen the signs of emotion on his



father's face with amazement and distress, averting his own eyes as though he had unwillingly surprised some secret shame. Reassured by the tone of his voice, he had looked again and seen the smile. It flashed into his mind that his father in his love for him was tearing off, for the first time, a mask and revealing himself as he really was. An irresistible impulse drove him to repay the confidence in kind.

"No, Father," he exclaimed, "I'm not good, and never have been. I've always been a coward, I cheated at school, and I'm a regular rake."

Before the words were well out of his mouth a cold shiver of fear shook him, an agony of apprehension. He could see his father, transformed in a moment into a stern and wrathful judge, casting him off as a disgusting hypocrite.

But the hand still lay on his knee and the smile on the face that fronted his, and when the voice spoke again, it was even softer than before.

"A coward, a cheat, and a rake—eh?" it said. "Well, Oliver, I've been all three in my time, but I've never had the pluck to own it. And I found some one to love me, and you've done the same."

## BOOK III

### I

“LET’S go to lunch a bit early to-day, shall we ? ” asked Bertie Squires, walking across to Oliver’s table.

With a hasty movement, Oliver covered the MS. book in which he was writing with a sheet of blotting-paper, and, looking up, nodded and smiled.

“Clever but unconvincing,” said Bertie. “I believe you’re writing poetry again. And at your age, too ! I’m surprised at you.”

“You ought to have been a detective,” answered Oliver, “though you’re wrong as well as right. It’s not business, but it’s not poetry either.”

“It’s something literary, I’ll swear. There’s that air of smug satisfaction about you which says, louder than words, ‘Immortality and I have just shaken hands.’ ”

This time Oliver laughed out.

“If that’s not literary, I don’t know what is,” he said. “You see—you’ll end by writing a play. Where shall we go ? ”

“Oh, Markham’s I suppose ; I can’t stand the furriner’s cooking more than twice a week.”

Markham’s was a highly respectable confec-

tioner's shop in Baker Street, with a small luncheon room at the back. Everything was good, and clean, and dear; not extravagantly so, but sufficiently to keep the room select. Both the young men were well known there, and the portly and dignified lady who presided over the shop gave them a friendly greeting. It was one feature of Markham's spotless character that nothing young and frisky ministered to the needs of the customers. Even the "boy" who took out the loaves had a big family of his own. Old Mr. Markham, a white-haired gentleman of vast proportions, magnificent in a frilled shirt and a watered-silk watch chain that looked like a young sash, visited the premises three times a week, and on these occasions sat in a high chair at the far end of the counter, dispensing stately benedictions on the few ancient customers who could remember him in his prime. Next to him came Miss Goss, the dignified lady already alluded to, and under her was another middle-aged spinster generally known as Miss B., tall and thin, with a miraculous waist so slender that the awed beholder could only marvel how the north and the south of her could ever communicate with each other. The two ladies had this in common, that while coldly polite to their own sex, all their affabilities were reserved for the gentlemen visitors. The luncheon-room attendant was an obvious widow whose identification was a shade more difficult than Miss B.'s, for she was always spoken of, and to, as "Mrs.," and nothing more.



Into Markham's, then, Oliver and Bertie walked, a good twenty minutes before the tables began to fill. The old man was sitting in his high chair, but of course took no notice of such creatures of yesterday. Miss Goss, however, bestowed on them a very gracious nod and "Good morning."

"That's right," said Bertie, as they saw that they were the first-comers. "It looks cosy by the fire, Now, Mrs., what are you going to give us, and when?"

Oxtail soup, it appeared, would be ready in five minutes—"Which means ten, if we're lucky," Oliver put in—but Mrs. tempered the disappointment by an offer of *The Times*, *Punch*, and *The Queen*.

All these Bertie collected and distributed among the most distant tables.

"Here, hold hard!" remonstrated Oliver, "I haven't seen this week's *Punch*."

"I'll buy you one, if that's all," said Bertie. "What do you suppose I got you to come here for, at this time?"

"A joke, I suppose; your sense of humour always was a bit crude. Do you remember Tiger?"

"Ah, don't I! I can see your sweet, innocent face now. By Jove! You *have* changed since then. No; it wasn't a joke. I want to talk business, and there's nothing to sharpen the intellect like the smell of food when you're hungry."

"It sharpens the appetite; I don't know so much about the intellect."

“ It also limits the discussion, at least the food does, when it comes.”

“ Agreed ! ” said Oliver. “ Fire away.”

“ Well,” Bertie began, suddenly becoming intensely serious, “ what about this blooming business ? Your father, for some inscrutable reason, put me into it and made me a partner. I’ve no doubt you were at the bottom of it, and that makes things worse. You see, I like the work, and it seems to suit me like a glove—you know I’m not troubled with modesty. Pringle’s a first-rate clerk, and now that he sees I’m a fixture he seems to have settled down and put ambition in its cot. It’s you that are the difficulty. You’re such an awful ass that you’re simply shoving me into the place that ought by rights to be yours, and I don’t like it ; and what’s more, I won’t have it. It makes me feel a supplanter and a beast, and the feeling is as disagreeable as it is novel. You are the senior partner. Act as such, and I’ll back you up for all I’m worth.”

Oliver looked round, hoping to see Mrs. and the oxtail soup, but he looked in vain. His instinct always was to postpone any difficult decision, yet he knew that Bertie was right. The longer they went on as they were, the more impossible would the situation become. It was ridiculous for the head of the firm to do the work of a junior clerk, and to be as free from responsibility, yet he felt himself quite incapable of taking the lead. He had always leaned on some one. It used to be Pringle, now it was

Bertie. The change made little difference to his sense of self-respect. He knew that the very office-boy looked upon him as a freak, if not a fool.

Yet he shrank from the violent change involved in leaving the business. Extraordinarily mistrustful of himself, the regularity of the office routine seemed to hold him like an anchor from vague, far-off perils, and the association with Bertie had added a new and a real pleasure to life. Nevertheless, now that the issue had been raised, he had no doubt as to what he must say and do.

“You are quite right,” he said, in a tone as quiet and serious as Bertie’s. “It is an impossible situation. I’ve known it for a long time, but I’m such an incurable coward that I’ve shirked talking about it. Of course, there’s only one thing to be done. I can’t do the work of a partner, so I’ll drop out. That’ll leave you with a free hand, and in a year or two’s time you’ll be doing a roaring business. I’ll go and see Watherston about it, to-morrow. He shall draw up the necessary deeds.”

“No,” answered Bertie firmly, “it isn’t quite as simple as all that. Watherston must hear what I’ve got to say, first. But we needn’t be in such a blazing hurry. I’d ever so much rather have you with me, if you’ll only take your proper place.”

“I’m in that now, but I know what you mean, and it’s impossible. I hate responsibility, I hate being tied, and I’m never in the same mind three months together. Whatever I do, I shall



wish I'd done the other thing, but Watherston shall draft the deeds—that's settled. Ah, Mrs., we were just thinking that the soup must have got into the refrigerator by mistake. I've had a dreadful time with Mr. Squires; you know what a temper he's got."

## II

The death of Martin Grimwood had been followed by the upheaval of the home. Neither Mrs. Bannock nor Oliver was devoted to the Avenue Road house, which, to tell the truth, was both gloomy and old-fashioned. Indeed, Martin himself had for some time been thinking of making a move. Rheumatism had begun to victimise Mrs. Bannock, and the doctor, against his own interest, strongly recommended a change from the London clay. Money was no object, for Martin's estate had exceeded his own estimate and the whole was left to Oliver, subject to an annuity of £500 to Mrs. Bannock. The idea of their separating was never so much as mentioned by either. She idolised him, and he was sincerely attached to her. Ultimately, a delightful house, surrounded by an even more delightful garden, was discovered hiding at Pinner, and here, the Easter following Martin's death, his sister and his son settled down to a life of "healthy vegetation"—so Bertie Squires put it. As a measure of precaution against the vegetation, Oliver took a small but very con-

venient bachelor's flat in Queen Anne's Mansions, and announced his intention of joining the volunteers and attending lectures. As a matter of fact, he was now nourishing serious literary ambitions, he was convinced that for such high enterprise periods of loneliness were essential, and where could one be so lonely as in the heart of London ?

Nor was this the only reason. Martin had never looked with favour on staying visitors, and, in consequence, Mrs. Bannock had been obliged to cut herself off, to a large extent, from her friends and relatives. Oliver himself sympathised a good deal with his father's feeling, but at the same time he saw that to continue his policy of exclusion would be more than ever hard upon Mrs. Bannock. But if he were spending a week or two in town, it would be easy and natural for her to ask one of her own circle to keep her company.

Was there yet another reason ? Was he thinking of a larger liberty than he could enjoy if all his days and nights were to be spent under the same roof with Mrs. Bannock ? He could hardly have answered the question himself. He knew that this result would be inevitable, but the other reasons, he felt, were quite sufficient.

Some time before his father's death, Oliver's double life had come to an end. Martin was a troublesome and a most unsentimental patient, especially when his growing weakness confined him to his bedroom. Then he was happy only when Oliver was close at hand, but even from

him he would not stand what he called "non-sense." Mrs. Bannock was feverishly anxious that he should have the Bible read to him, and had made out a list of suitable passages. When Oliver found an opportunity, and asked whether he should read something, Martin smiled and nodded. "What shall it be?" Oliver asked, and his father, with a sudden gleam in his eyes, answered, "Why, *Reynolds*', of course," and at the end of the reading, said:

"Good night, Oliver. Tell your aunt not to make a fool of herself."

In the shadow of his impending loss, all Oliver's most powerful temptations seemed to wither and die. He reproached himself often and bitterly for what now seemed almost like a fit of madness, while at the same time he was conscious of a certain glow of satisfaction, a sense of self-conquest. Sometimes he even dreamed of helping others out of the slough into which he had fallen, and from which he had escaped. The thought of the confession he had blurted out to his father comforted him. It was from that moment, he told himself, that the emancipation and the new life began. He had never neglected the religious observances that had been matters of habit since his confirmation as a boy. Of late they had been occasions of self-abasement and vows of amendment. Now he went to them with a happy and a thankful heart. After all, he had but singed his wings, and the flame attracted him no more.

Martin Grimwood's death was just what he



himself would have chosen. He passed away in his sleep, with Oliver watching by his bed. The young man often wondered whether his father feared death, and whether at the end he would see the Vicar, who called several times. Mrs. Bannock did on one occasion timorously suggest such an interview, but the suggestion was rejected so flatly that she never repeated it. And Oliver watched in awe and wonder the retreat from life conducted with such brusque courage and with no sign of disorder.

Then had followed all the readjustments of the business and the home, culminating in the move to Pinner and the furnishing of the London flat. And after all this bustle and excitement, had come the revival of his old fancy for literary expression. This time it was a romance of the artistic life, and the first ten thousand words ran from his pen with the most astonishing and delightful facility. Even when the flow slackened, his mind was filled with happy dreams of fame and popularity. He had toyed with the piano and the pencil; now, with the pen, he had really found himself. "Music, painting, and literature," he said to himself, "these three; but the greatest of these is literature."

### III

Among the first of Mrs. Bannock's guests at Pinner was Mr. Henning. He was accompanied by his niece, Ethel Henning, whom he had

adopted. Close to the seventies, he looked his age, but—ostensibly in the interests of his niece—went about in society more than when he first returned from India. He had now established himself in a comfortable little villa, close to Clapham Common, with Ethel to keep house for him. She was a slim, fair girl, not pretty according to rule and measure, but by no means insignificant or unattractive. In repose her expression was inclined to be apathetic, sometimes almost supercilious, but the moment she was interested, her face lit up wonderfully. She had been reared as one of a large family in straitened circumstances, and, in spite of her uncle's crotchets, she found the change to comparative wealth very delightful. Mrs. Bannock took a great fancy to her, and when Mr. Henning returned to Clapham he left Ethel behind him, for another week at any rate.

So it was that Oliver, coming down to Pinner after a fortnight in town, found Ethel installed in the guest's room. On neither side were first impressions wholly favourable. "Weak," she said to herself: "Affected," he pronounced her.

He reached "Bannockburn"—so he had named the new house, as a compliment to Aunt Alice—about nine o'clock in the evening, and saw Ethel for the first time. It was a cheerless November night and, coming in from the damp mist and heavy mud, the bright lights, the fresh paint, the glow and crackle of the logs on the hearth, and Mrs. Bannock's kind, welcoming face, all made a most vivid and delightful contrast. Then he

saw, just rising from an easy-chair by the fire, the figure of a girl wearing a blue dress, the shade of which caught his eye before it rested on her face.

“ This is Ethel,” began Mrs. Bannock.

“ I’m so glad you like it,” said the young lady, holding out her hand with a frank friendliness that struck Oliver as more masculine than feminine. But the smile on her face was decidedly attractive, and so was the gleam of fun in her eye. It put him at his ease, and he forgot to be shy.

“ It’s exactly the right shade by this light,” he declared, “ I haven’t seen anything so pretty for a long time.”

“ What ever are you talking about, my dear boy ? ” asked Mrs. Bannock, who had not seen Oliver’s glance of admiration.

“ Mr. Grimwood likes the colour of my frock,” answered the girl demurely.

“ We always used to be told that it was rude to make remarks on other people’s clothes,” remarked Mrs. Bannock.

“ That was before frocks were as pretty as they are now, and besides, I didn’t make any remark,” said Oliver, quite impenitent ; and just then Ellen the parlour-maid came in and began laying the cloth for the young master’s supper. Before the food was on the table, Ethel stood up and, pleading a slight headache, said “ Good night.”

Hardly was she out of the room, when Mrs. Bannock exclaimed enthusiastically :



“Isn’t she a charming girl? She’s old-fashioned and new-fashioned both, and she seems to have taken the best of both fashions. She’s very clever too. Her uncle says she talks French and German like a native, and she’s passed all sorts of examinations. She was preparing to be a teacher when he adopted her.”

“I’m glad I didn’t know she was so learned,” answered Oliver. “I shouldn’t have ventured to say a word to her.”

“Oh, but she’s not a bit of a blue-stocking. She’s full of fun, and so unselfish. She’s not been here a fortnight, but I know I shall miss her dreadfully.”

“She looks smart, and she’s got an eye for colour, but I should hardly have thought she was such a paragon.”

“You should hear her uncle talk about her!” said Mrs. Bannock. “And you know he’s not enthusiastic, as a rule.”

Breakfast was at half-past eight, and, for a wonder, Oliver was down, five minutes before time. He found Ethel kneeling by the fire, busy with a toasting-fork. She looked over her shoulder at him and smiled.

“Good morning,” she said. “Will you please excuse my not getting up? Aunt Alice likes my way of making toast, and if you stop in the middle, it’s spoilt.”

He noticed the “Aunt Alice.”

“Good morning,” he replied. “It’s awfully good of you to do that. Aren’t you afraid of ruining your complexion?”

He had come close to the fire, so that she could look up at him without turning round.

“Does it look as bad as all that?” she asked with mock anxiety.

As a matter of fact, though Oliver had not, as yet, noticed it, the pallor of her complexion was a distinct blemish. Now, her face tinged by the glow of the fire, she looked indubitably pretty. But what puzzled him was, how she had disarmed or dissipated the shyness which generally kept him silent and ill at ease in ordinary society. In less reputable circles indeed, he could, like Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer*, be an agreeable Rattle, and Mount had more than once complimented him on the spirit with which he had answered some very forward little minxes according to their folly. Indeed, this feeling of confidence and ease had been one of the attractions of what he now felt were forbidden paths.

The round of toast was finished, and Ethel sprang up, came to the table, and began to butter it with exquisite care. Oliver was hungry, and the fragrance of the buttered toast was tantalising. He gave an appreciative sniff.

“I wonder whether you’d cut me another round, Mr. Grimwood,” she said. “Just this thickness, no more and no less, and exactly the same all the way round.”

“I’ll do my best,” he answered, “but why don’t you let Maud do it? You’re burning your hands as well as scorching your face.”

“And you must be writing a book—yes, you’re blushing.”

And, knife in hand, she pointed an accusing finger at him.

It was an unlucky remark, for the blush immediately assumed magnificent proportions, but he managed to ask,

“How do you know?”

“Two words for the same thing—it’s only literary men who are as extravagant as that.”

But the blush had robbed him of his confidence, and he only mumbled, “I wonder where the paper is,” and hurried out of the room.

When he ventured back, Mrs. Bannock was pouring out the tea, and the second round of toast—sweeter-smelling, if possible, than the first—was on a plate in front of his chair.

“Oh no!” he declared. “You must have this for yourself.”

“I never eat buttered toast,” she replied. “It’s bad for the complexion.”

“You try it, Oliver,” said Mrs. Bannock. “I’ve never tasted such buttered toast in my life. Do you make it for your uncle, Ethel?”

“When he’s very good, and when he’s very tiresome: a reward and a bribe.”

“Is there anything in the paper, Oliver?” asked Mrs. Bannock.

“That everlasting Parnell Commission has come to an end at last. That’s something to be thankful for.”

“What are your politics, Mr. Grimwood?” asked Ethel.



“ I haven’t got any,” he answered. “ I used to be a Liberal because my father was one : now, I suppose I’m a Conservative to follow Aunt Alice.”

“ That’s nonsense, Oliver,” remonstrated Mrs. Bannock. “ Your dear father certainly used to have *Reynolds’ Newspaper*, but I don’t believe he agreed with half that’s in it.”

“ He’s often told me,” said Oliver, “ that it didn’t go far enough for him.”

“ That was only his humour. It wasn’t easy to know what he really did think about politics.”

Oliver turned to Ethel.

“ Do you go in for politics at all ? ”

“ I think they’re awfully interesting,” she answered.

“ And which side are you on, my dear ? ” asked Mrs. Bannock.

“ I change about a good deal,” she answered. “ When I was at home, I was a fierce Radical because the boys were vituperative Tories and always thrusting it down my throat. With Uncle Henry I’m an inquiring soul, because he’s reasonable and loves teaching. And with you, Aunt Alice, I’m a good, steady-going Conservative.”

Mrs. Bannock looked a little shocked.

“ But, my dear,” she said, “ we must have convictions of our own and stand by them.”

“ I’m feeling my way to mine,” answered the girl. “ When I get them, I’ll be like a rock.”

## IV

Oliver had intended making only a very short stay at home, but, as things turned out, he stopped nearly a week, and when he returned to town he escorted Ethel Henning. By that time they were excellent friends. She, indeed, had exerted herself to the utmost to please him, but so skilfully, that he never for a moment suspected it.

"She's a glorified schoolgirl," he said to Mrs. Bannock, "so frank and simple and hearty, and yet so clever and so well informed. It's a real pleasure to have a talk with her."

"She's all that, and she's more," his aunt replied. "She's a genuine, good-hearted girl. She seems to be always on the look-out to do a kindness, and the way she notices and remembers is quite wonderful. Perhaps it's time she went. In another week or two I should have been like a spoilt child."

"Have her again soon," Oliver said. He felt he could put up with a little spoiling, himself.

"They're going to the South of France for the winter. Mr. Henning feels the cold so. They've promised to come again in the spring."

After this episode, Oliver's life settled down once more into the ruts of routine. Every week-end he spent at Pinner; from Monday to Saturday in alternate weeks he stayed in town. The mornings were supposed to be devoted to literary work. "Isidor," so the romance had been

christened, after its wonderful start had suddenly begun to halt. Eleven thousand words had been typed, and Oliver knew them almost by heart. But something had gone wrong, and, morning after morning, he sat down at his writing table, dipped his pen in the ink, wrote the date in the margin and perhaps a few non-committal introductory words. Then he would lay the pen down, light a cigarette, and, wheeling his chair round to the fire, begin to "think," which meant recalling incidents of the past, or building castles in the air—at which kind of architecture he was an adept. If a second attempt at writing produced no better results, he would take up some favourite book—a volume of Thackeray or Dickens, or a boy's tale—of these he was immoderately fond—and read till lunch. The afternoon he often spent at the British Museum reading-room, where he revelled in desultory reading, starting half a dozen hares and burrowing deep into their sometimes unsavoury holes. He spent a good deal of time at the National Gallery and the current picture shows, and in his clubs, especially the Arts and Letters in Jermyn Street. Concerts and the theatre accounted for most of his evenings in town, though one evening in that week was always reserved for Bertie Squires.

It was not a very exhilarating programme, especially for one who had already more than a nodding acquaintanceship with the seamy side of London life. Gradually, very gradually at first, his mind began to revert to what he called



the days of his infatuation. Dead and buried he had thought them, but now he saw them again in his day-dreams, and more vividly every week. That strange dance at Cutlin's studio, which at the time had sickened him—now, every detail seemed to stand forth with a vitality and a power of fascination that were simply terrifying. Paris was half-way to a madhouse but he had managed to be impressive, a result which sane men achieve seldom enough. Miss Schimpf might have been the heroine of a show-booth ; still, she was really funny, and looked the soul of good-humour. Cutlin certainly was a bounder but he was no fool. And then there was that girl that had recalled Sophie Zanetti—Nesta Somervil—he never could forget her dance on the table ; what spirit, and grace, and abounding life. What a face, too ! What fun and daring in those dark eyes, and yet he could picture them tender.

Sometimes it was the Bungalow that drew his thoughts, and more than once he laughed to find himself humming, "Becky and I went out on the sly." How he had enjoyed those first evenings, before any real mischief began. Mount—well, he was a dangerous chap, no doubt. In his own way, though, he was a real genius, and he really had been wonderfully kind, too kind, in fact. He must have been rather surprised to find himself suddenly dropped, apparently without rhyme or reason. Perhaps it was a bit too summary. One could be firm and decisive—he felt a glow—without being positively rude. It

was strange that he had never come across Mount since he had begun to go about again. It might be a bit awkward, but his father's death would explain a good deal, and he could easily keep his distance.

Once at least, in a fit of religious exaltation, he made up his mind to seek out Mount and Bateman and Lipstein, and perhaps Cutlin, and call them solemnly to repentance. These fits, however, were rare, and seldom lasted more than twenty-four hours, so the experiment—not a very hopeful one—remained untried.

But one afternoon, a few days before Christmas, Oliver opened the door of the smoking-room at the Arts and Letters, to find himself face to face with Hector Camroux, who had originally introduced him to the club. The Frenchman had always been very friendly, though he did not belong to Mount's circle.

"Ah, Grimwood," he exclaimed heartily, "I'm glad to see you again. It must be months since I've seen you. Don't you think it is time you did another Clytie?"

Oliver smiled.

"I got sick of spoiling good paper," he said, "though I'm doing the same thing now, in another way. I'm trying my hand at writing. I'm a rolling stone, you know."

"I was afraid you'd rolled over the edge. I've known more than one paper-spoiler do that. But perhaps you're *not* spoiling your new kind of paper."

"I dare say I am, but I haven't got a little

crowd looking over my shoulder to tell me so. Have you seen anything of Mount lately ? ”

“ Mount ? No ; he’s painting in Sicily, at least he was ; he ought to be back by now. His pastel show was quite a success.”

“ Was it ? I didn’t know he’d had one.”

“ Oh yes ; in Bond Street. If he’s back, he’s sure to be in here before long.”

That night Oliver was due at Pinner, and he went, but with reluctant feet. In a moment, it seemed, the temptations that he had thought dead and buried had sprung to life, and were thundering at the door of his heart. The monotonous round of the virtuous, humdrum life was absolutely intolerable. It was drab, and he hungered and thirsted for colour, the louder the better. A score of incidents, humorous, naughty, grotesque, rose in his mind, and he dwelt upon them with deep enjoyment. He did, indeed, make some effort, from time to time, to free himself from what an authoritative inner voice told him was a disgraceful and degrading yoke. But all the time he knew quite well that he was in the toils, and as a willing prisoner.

Nevertheless, when he reached Bannockburn there was no sign whatever of any change in his ingenuous countenance. He listened to Mrs. Bannock’s budget of local items, and discussed it as if he were entirely absorbed in it, and when she demanded London news he found plenty to entertain her with. Nor was this hypocrisy. For the moment he was keenly interested. But



all the time he could hear the song of the sirens, low now, but very sweet, echoing in his heart.

## V

Oliver stood on the steps of the Arts and Letters, staring out through a pale but dirty mist on the dull vistas of Jermyn Street. It was a damp, raw day, unpleasant even for January, and his spirits were at zero. "Isidor" had been worse than ever, and he felt that he was getting sick of the job. The mere sight of his elegant manuscript book revolted him. He was still a very young man, but into his short life he had already managed to crowd a wonderful assortment of failures. That morning he had seen Bertie, alert, busy, self-reliant, the reins of the big concern well in his strong young hands. The contrast between this spectacle and that of his own ineptitude had stung him all the more, because it now seemed to him that he could easily have taken his proper place if he had only been able to summon a little resolution. How he might have pleased his father! As it was, his career must have been one continued, bitter disappointment. The old man had toiled, and scraped, and spent his strength in making money, and his son, a sickly, helpless, useless weakling, could do nothing but waste it.

It was a train of thought that he always dreaded—the truth in it made it dreadful—and of late it had beset him constantly. In his cosy

flat, amid the comforts of Bannockburn, in the Museum, even at church, he heard the silent reproaches—"Weakling! Failure!"

A hansom stopped outside the club, and a short, dapper man, in a beautiful fur-lined overcoat, got out, paid his fare, and came towards him, the light of recognition suddenly showing in his eyes. It was Geoffrey Mount.

"Why, Grim, my boy," he exclaimed, holding out his hand, "what's the matter? You look as if you were trying to live up to your name. Anyone would think you'd seen a ghost."

He was quite right. At the sight of him Oliver's mood of querulous gloom had changed in, and for, a moment to absolute panic. For months he had been telling himself that his chains were broken, and that he had put the past behind him. Yet, almost all the time, there had been the secret longing for a renewal of that past, and now in the return of Mount his unspoken prayer had been answered, and he was terrified.

His instinctive power of dissimulation came to the rescue, and the smile of welcome that transfigured his face was exquisitely natural. And before it died away, the need for dissimulation had gone. An immoderate delight at the thought of what Mount's return meant for him in the immediate future filled his heart and mind.

"I was down in the dumps," he said, "and this beastly weather was the last straw. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you. Come

in, and tell me what you've been doing with yourself."

"You've got something to tell too," said Mount, when they were comfortably seated in the smoking-room. "I thought you'd turned pi. and were going to cut all your wicked friends and friendesses. Why, I never set eyes on you after that dance at Cutlin's."

"I thought you knew," answered Oliver. "My father's health broke down soon after that, and he died. Since then, I've moved out to Pinner, and of course there was no end of business worry."

"I'm awfully sorry; I did hear something, but it was only a rumour, or I would have written. How do you like living in the country?"

"It's rather dead-and-alive and I don't care much about growing cabbages. But I'm not a fixture down there. I've got a rather jolly little flat at the Queen Anne's monstrosity. You must come and see me there"

"I will," said Mount, and immediately Oliver felt again that strange mingling of diverse emotions—eager pleasure and guilty fear.

## VI

"Checkmate!" said Bertie, with a chuckle.

"Oh dash it!" exclaimed Oliver. "If you hadn't shoved that stupid pawn there, I should have had you on toast."



“The pawn’s been under orders for half an hour. It’s a fine game, is chess.”

“I won’t play it any more with you,” Oliver declared. “It brings into action your most offensive characteristic.”

“Which is?”

“Your beastly habit of doing everything better than I can.”

“Playing the piano, for instance.”

“You’d do it, if you took a few lessons.”

“Don’t talk rot. You’ve got about twice my brains, and you’ve got an imagination, which I haven’t?”

“What about Tiger?”

“I had a little,” Bertie admitted, “when I was a boy, but it’s atrophied now.”

“I wish mine were,” said Oliver so seriously that Bertie shot a quick glance of surprise at him, and then, after a pause, remarked:

“Perhaps you’ve got a little too much.”

“No,” answered Oliver deliberately, “the trouble is that I haven’t got character enough to carry it.”

“I rather fancy myself as a judge of human nature,” said Bertie—and he meant it—“and you’re quite good enough for me.”

Oliver got up and fetched a bottle, a siphon, and a couple of glasses.

“It’s a painful subject; let’s change it. Have some Scotch?”

Bertie shook his head.

“No, thanks. I haven’t character enough to carry it.”

“ Oh come, then, I do score a point at last,” said Oliver as he mixed a stiff glass and drank it off. “ I always know when to pull up.”

Bertie made no direct reply but, after a pause, began on quite a different tack.

“ Why don't you marry ? It would be the making of you. I'll stand godfather to the first boy. That would give him a chance, if anything would.”

“ Nothing would,” answered Oliver, again in that rare tone which never failed to impress Bertie. “ The world can do very well without any more Oliver Grimwoods.”

“ Oh, but that's all nonsense,” remonstrated Bertie. “ The second edition of a book's often a vast improvement on the first.”

Oliver shook his head gloomily.

“ There are some books that ought to be suppressed as soon as they're published.”

“ I'm one, I suppose,” answered Bertie, “ still, I'd like to see a little joker with a bit of the old Bertie in him, but with a few up-to-date improvements as well. There are a lot of addenda and corrigenda about me, I know.”

“ I believe you think more about the book-case than the book. Are you still looking at empty houses ? I believe that's what tempted you, in the governor's offer.”

Bertie smiled.

“ There were other and more massive temptations,” he said, “ but it did seem funny to get the chance of making a living by one's hobby. Do you know, I've just let myself a house.”

“No! Where?”

“Amherst Terrace—on the edge of Bayswater.”

“Why—do you mean——”

“Yes, I do. You see why I’m interested in your future.”

“Ah, you’re different. It’s all right for you, old man, and I congratulate you with all my heart. Who is the lady?”

“Why, that’s rather funny, too. She’s a daughter of old Lucifer. There were two or three, you remember. They were too small for us to take much notice of; we used to call them the Fry. You can’t have forgotten.”

“Oh no; I remember the Fry all right. There was one with fluffy hair, we used to call Araminta.”

“That’s the very one. Her hair’s still a bit blowy, but, except for that, I don’t think you’d know her. She remembered you. They used to call you Pretty Boy.”

“Lucky for them I didn’t hear it,” said Oliver, looking as truculent as he could.

“If you keep that face, she’ll never recognise you. She’s awfully anxious to meet you.”

“Bring her down to Pinner next Sunday. Aunt Alice will be delighted.”

Just as Bertie was leaving, another visitor walked in, to Oliver’s secret annoyance, though, as usual, no one would have guessed it from his face or manner.

“I don’t think you’ve met before,” he said, looking at Bertie. “This is Mount, the dis-



tinguished artist. You've often heard me speak of him. And this"—he turned to Mount—"is Squires, the friend of my youth, and my supplanter at the office. Do you think he looks like a Jacob?"

"About as much as you look like Esau," answered Mount, smiling affably on Bertie.

"We were just talking about matrimony," said Oliver. "Squires thinks of turning Benedict. What does your worldly wisdom say to that?"

"For a young man," Mount answered, "marriage is an act of quixotic generosity. For a middle-aged man, it is sometimes a prudent investment. For an old man, it is often a sad necessity."

"What do you mean?" demanded Bertie, so brusquely that Mount seemed quite flustered, and Oliver smiled.

"Why," answered the philosopher, pulling himself together, "I should have thought it was plain enough. A young man naturally wants pleasure, a middle-aged man comfort, and an old man a nurse."

"A fine chivalrous view of life," said Bertie, taking no pains to conceal his contempt. "Well, I must be off now."

"Where ever did you pick up that unspeakable little sweep?" he asked, as Oliver let him out.

"I met him at those art classes I used to go to. He paints like an angel."

"And talks like a devil. I hope you like the mixture better than I should."

## VII

Early in April, Mr. Henning came back to England, and Ethel paid another visit to Bannockburn. As before, her uncle brought her, and Oliver was there to receive them. Mr. Henning had been kind to him when he was a boy, but his kindness was of that solid utilitarian variety which compels gratitude more often than it wins affection. Time had done nothing to make his arid personality more attractive, and, before dinner was over, Oliver was desperately bored by the old gentleman's copious flow of instructive remarks. He was just seeing through the press an Italian Manual in his Positive-Perfect language series, and the virtues and unmerited neglect of that system proved an inexhaustible theme. If it were not for jealousy and red tape, he declared, the English might be at least a tri-lingual people in twelve months' time. With great difficulty, Oliver shunted the conversation to Mentone, but gained little by the change.

"The hills round," the lecturer declaimed, "as you are possibly aware, belong to the oolitic limestone, but the town itself stands on sandstone with interstratified slates."

"That sounds like a guide-book," said Oliver flippantly, and immediately felt a hassock pushed against his foot. Mr. Henning, however, took no notice, but went on, only transferring his address from Oliver to Mrs. Bannock.

“The geology of the neighbourhood is exceedingly interesting. Remarkable collections of flints have been found in the caverns. Ethel and I have brought back some very fine specimens. Ethel, my dear, remember, the next time you come, to bring a few of the best.”

“You must look them out for me, then,” said Ethel. “Uncle has taught me a lot about them,” she added, turning to Mrs. Bannock, “but I’m still a very poor judge.”

“She doesn’t do herself justice,” declared Mr. Henning. “She is a remarkably apt pupil. I couldn’t wish a better.”

“You were right on the spot, about the geology of Mentone,” Ethel said to Oliver, in the drawing-room, half an hour afterwards. “Yes; it’s all right, uncle’s quite deaf on this side. That bit about the sandstone and the slate is almost word for word out of Murray. And as for the flints, there was a slimy old Jew, or Armenian, or something, who simply palmed them off on Uncle. It made me so mad. I hate to see good money thrown into the gutter, don’t you?”

“I’m afraid I’ve thrown some there myself, so I can’t cast stones. And the exercise really is pleasant, if you’ve got the stuff.”

“Well,” said the girl, her eyes on a pretty little ring that gleamed on a still prettier finger, “I suppose it depends a good deal on the gutter.”

Oliver’s eyes followed hers and noted the two pretty things.

“There’s the shop gutter,” he said.



“ Yes, and the book gutter, and the frock gutter, and a few others—but flints ! They’re as bad as blue china and faked antiquities.”

“ That’s just what a lot of them are.”

“ Now, Oliver,” said Mrs. Bannock, “ I dare say Ethel will sing for us, if you will play her accompaniment.”

“ What shall I sing ? ” she asked.

“ One of your Italian songs,” commanded Mr. Henning, his mind having reverted to the Positive-Perfect method ; and with the prettiest little grimace, and a quick glance at Oliver, she complied. When the song was over, Mr. Henning called attention to one or two slight errors in pronunciation which, however, he declared were quite venial. Then Mrs. Bannock begged for some of the old favourites, and Ethel sang “ The Sands of Dee ” and “ Home, Sweet Home.”

“ Now, Mr. Grimwood,” she said, as she left the piano, “ it’s your turn.”

“ Yes, Oliver,” Mr. Henning seconded her, “ I dare say you know some of the German lieder, or a French chanson. I like hearing foreign music in an English drawing-room. As you know, it has always been my great desire to facilitate international intercourse by showing the simplicity of scientific linguistics.”

“ I’m sorry,” answered Oliver, “ but the only songs I know are English, and most of those I’ve forgotten.”

But Mrs. Bannock whispered in Ethel’s ear, and she walked over to the music stand and opened a book.

"These are your songs, aren't they?" she asked.

"Yes, I suppose they are," he answered, shaking his head at Aunt Alice.

"Very well, then, I demand 'Twickenham Ferry,'" she said, "and I'll turn over the pages for you."

"They make a fine pair, Alice," said Mr. Henning in a low voice, under cover of the music.

"Yes, indeed they do," she answered. "It would make me very happy. But it would be hard on you."

"Oh no," he said comfortably. "There are any number of sisters to choose from."

## VIII

Ethel Henning was a daughter of the Church, her father having been vicar of Whittlecombe, in Wiltshire, for twenty-five years. It was a poor living in more senses than one, and the long waiting for preferment that never came had soured him. Two hundred and fifty a year is not a fortune, and a family of ten children soon makes such an income look foolish. Of this family, Ethel was the third. Lizzie, the eldest, was good but plain, and not remarkably clever. Will, a bank clerk, came first of the boys. Connie and Grace followed Ethel, and then five more boys brought up the rear. Of the girls, Ethel was obviously the best looking and the cleverest.

Already in the house she had earned the reputation of always getting what she wanted. When prosperous Uncle Henry wrote offering to provide for one of the daughters, Lizzie naturally expected to have the refusal of the offer. But when he came to visit his brother, it was Ethel who met him at the station, and the formal offer was confined to her. For once, Lizzie asserted herself, though in vain. "It's a shame!" she exclaimed. "I've had all the hard work and the anxiety, and now when this chance comes, you push yourself in before me."

Ethel did not lose her temper—she very seldom did. She only shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Between you and me," she replied, "I don't think Uncle Henry's little daughter will have such an outrageously good time. Unless I'm very much mistaken, Nunky's a bit of a bore. But I can stand that, and I shall get round him much better than you would, and do a lot better for the family. And another thing, Liz; I should make a wretched eldest sister after you. I can be spared, and you can't."

And Lizzie, half flattered, half convinced, had let herself be coaxed and kissed into acquiescence, if not approval.

Ethel had done her very best to justify her action, of which, indeed, she was a little ashamed. Lizzie had received on her next birthday a gold watch. Tom and Algy, the second and third of the boys, had, through their uncle's influence, found good berths in business, while Donald, a



clever lad of twelve, had been sent to Mr. Lan-  
yard at Eastbourne. And a very respectable  
tithe out of her allowance went to the vicarage  
in the form of occasional gifts.

Her character was not easy to read, and even  
at home she was looked upon as more or less of a  
mystery. Usually she was good-tempered and  
lively, but the boys knew that it was not wise to  
tease her beyond a certain point. She was ob-  
viously clever, yet at school her position had  
been respectable—no more. Her real abilities  
showed themselves in the management of people,  
and in attention to details. She had a very  
strong will, but she knew how to withdraw from  
an untenable position. She was very careful  
and punctual in the performance of routine  
duties, and she seemed to place them all on the  
same level or near it. She said her prayers as  
regularly and systematically as she brushed her  
hair, and she would have felt about equally un-  
comfortable if she had neglected either obliga-  
tion. She was a born pleasure-lover, and she  
had felt and resented the poverty of her home  
far more than her father or mother had suspected.  
While she was still at school she had made up  
her mind to emancipate herself from this thral-  
dom at the very earliest opportunity. She had  
made several attempts, but with poor success  
till Uncle Henry made his proposal. This was  
her opportunity and she seized it.

It was a long step forward, but she had no  
intention of letting it be the last. It only  
enlarged the prospect and gave her a new con-

fidence. Other opportunities, she told herself, were sure to come. The death of Martin Grimwood approved her judgment. Uncle Henry, who was not sentimental, and had a profound reverence for a comfortable income, broached the subject to her in the most matter-of-fact way.

“Young Oliver,” he said, “is a lucky lad. He can’t be much more than one and twenty if he’s any, and now he’ll be master of £50,000 and a good business as well. It seems a pity for all that to go out of the family. I don’t see why you shouldn’t have half of it, upon my word! I don’t.”

“He may have other views, on such a subject,” she suggested.

“Of course, of course,” he assented. “But if there had been anything at all definite, I think Alice would have let me know. I had a letter from her quite lately.”

“What sort is he?” she asked.

“My dear Ethel, I wish you would not use those hyper-elliptical forms of speech, what, in the preface to my last ‘Manual,’ I called ‘the dot-and-carry style.’ I suppose you mean what sort of a young man. Well, as young men go nowadays, I should call him quite a favourable specimen, though I must admit I haven’t seen much of him for some time. As a boy he was distinctly promising, but his health broke down, and his education suffered. He was at Lanyard’s school where I have sent Donald.”

He paused for a moment, and Ethel’s instinct interpreted the pause.

“ Oh, Uncle dear,” she exclaimed with just the right strength of fervour, “ it is good and generous of you ! ”

“ You must not interrupt me, my dear,” he said, but there was no rebuke in his tone, “ or I shall lose the thread of what I was saying. Donald will repay me, I hope, by making good use of his opportunities. We were talking of Oliver Grimwood. Well, he recovered his health and went into his father’s business. I wanted them to send him to the University. He was inclined to be shy and self-conscious and it would have done him a great deal of good. Still, perhaps it may all turn out for the best. He is a regular home boy, and, according to his aunt, he has never given them a moment’s anxiety—except in relation to his health.”

Ethel’s lip curled ever so slightly.

“ Those pattern people are rather terrible,” she remarked.

“ *Il a les défauts de ses qualités*, no doubt, but you could soon help him to get rid of them. And you may depend upon it that he will be much more frightened of you than you of him. If you can put him at his ease, you can do anything you like with him.”

“ Oh, I expect I could put him at his ease, if I got the chance.”

“ I shall see that you have that,” said her uncle, and he kept his word.



## IX

The last of the visitors had just gone. Oliver gave a prodigious yawn.

"I was afraid you were being bored," Mrs. Bannock said, remorsefully. "It was so good of you to come in. It's years since I've seen you at one of my 'At Homes.'"

"I wasn't a bit bored," he answered. "I was watching Cousin Ethel tackle the bores and I was lost in admiration. The way she quieted that Riddle kid was simply a masterpiece."

"Yes," added Mrs. Bannock, "she is a little spoilt. I quite thought we were in for a scene. You managed her wonderfully."

"That's what comes of being one of a large family," said Ethel. "Small brothers and sisters are fine models to practise on."

"They must be too much of a good thing, sometimes," Oliver remarked meditatively.

"Not if you're really fond of children," answered Ethel, who wasn't.

"I believe you'd be kind to anything and anybody," exclaimed Oliver. "If you don't take care, you'll be victimised right and left."

"I've got Uncle Henry to look after me."

"I'd sooner trust your own gumption," said Mrs. Bannock briskly. Uncle Henry had been a little too much for her on his last visit.

"Oh well," Ethel declared, "I don't believe the sea's full of sharks."

"No indeed," said Oliver, "or they'd soon

starve. There are millions of flat-fish, and a few gold-fish too."

"You're one of them, you know," she said.

"And what are you, my dear?" asked Mrs. Bannock, beaming affectionately and impartially on the two young people.

"Oh, a poor little flat, of course," she replied. "Cousin Oliver said so."

"I don't remember saying so, and I certainly never thought it. Shall I tell you what I really think about you?"

"No, please don't. You might make a slip and speak the truth."

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Bannock, not quite pleased, "Oliver always does speak the truth."

Oliver's cheeks immediately hung out the scarlet banner, and Ethel said to herself—"Aha! Not such a saint, after all." Aloud, she said, addressing Mrs. Bannock:

"That's just what I meant, Auntie. It'd be as bad as asking George Washington for a character."

But Mrs. Bannock was not quite satisfied.

"It sounded as though if he spoke the truth it would be by a slip."

"Oh, bother words! I'm always tripping up over them. I only meant that he'd try to spare me, but that some unpleasant truth might slip out."

By this time Oliver had recovered.

"If you want a character," he said, "take the risk and come to me."

“Perhaps I may,” she said, and both Mrs. Bannock and Oliver thought they could detect a significance in the tone. “Uncle Henry may grow tired of having me ; he often talks about the freedom of a bachelor’s life.”

As she spoke, she lifted her eyes and looked at Oliver. The first flush was still on his cheeks, but he certainly seemed ill at ease. Mrs. Bannock came to the rescue.

“I don’t think you need be afraid, my dear,” she said. “But whatever happens, you know where to find at least two friends.”

“Yes, indeed,” declared Oliver warmly, for he saw that the girl’s eyes were glistening and she looked almost beautiful. Indeed she was touched, and registered a little vow that she would make him a good wife.

## X

At the end of a week, Ethel returned to Putney. She would gladly have yielded when Mrs. Bannock pressed her to stay longer, but Mr. Henning had a sudden attack of lumbago and was ordered to Torquay, where Ethel must, of course, accompany him, to her intense annoyance. Perhaps it was just as well that the letter came by the first post in the morning and was brought to her in her bedroom. She glanced at it and flung it on the dressing-table.

“Silly old man !” she exclaimed. “It’s a nurse he wants, not a niece.”



By breakfast time, however, her mood seemed to have changed to a tender solicitude.

"Poor dear uncle," she said. "He suffers dreadfully with these attacks. They make him so irritable he hardly knows what to do with himself. I must go to him at once."

"It's a nice prospect for you," said Oliver, who was at least as much put out as she herself.

"I like the feeling of being of some use," she answered. "Don't you?"

"I've never experienced it," Oliver replied, "but you must be about gorged, I should have thought."

"Oliver," said Mrs. Bannock, "I won't have you always running yourself down. For kindness and unselfishness I don't believe there's a pin to choose between the pair of you."

"There," exclaimed Ethel, looking at Oliver, "now, who's to say 'Thank you' for that?"

"I, of course," he answered. "It lifts me up to your level. But must you really go?"

"Oh yes, indeed I must."

She spoke decisively, but the short sentence ended on a little sigh that sounded—as it was—perfectly natural.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Bannock, "if you feel like that, I won't say any more. You must come again when your uncle is all right, and finish your time."

"I shall love to," the girl answered warmly.

It was settled that she should start soon after lunch, and Oliver announced that he would accompany her home and see for himself how

Uncle Henry was. Mrs. Bannock warmly approved, and Ethel made no attempt to conceal her pleasure.

They found Mr. Henning in his study, looking very miserable in spite of a warm dressing-gown and a blazing fire. A big bowl half-full of porridge stood on the table at his side. His face brightened when he saw them, though he seemed a little taken aback at the warmth of Ethel's kiss and at Oliver's solicitude.

"Feed a cold and starve a fever," said Ethel, looking with disgust at the porridge. "What you want is something tasty."

"I remembered that you liked these," added Oliver, displaying a basket of the finest Muscat grapes, the pursuit of which had taken them miles out of their way.

"It's very good of you, my dear boy," said Uncle Henry with most unusual warmth. "It's the one thing I really feel an appetite for. But I'm afraid you've been very extravagant. It seems a sin to eat such fruit."

"Then I'm a sinner, Uncle," exclaimed Ethel, "for Cousin Oliver made me take a bunch. He said I oughtn't to let you have anything until I'd satisfied myself that it was up to the mark."

"Do you think I may venture?"

"A little bunch," she answered, offering him one, "by way of *hors-d'œuvre*."

In telling to Mrs. Bannock the story of his visit, Oliver declared that he had never seen Uncle Henry so nearly human. He fidgeted about, and looked all round the room.

“What is it you want?” Ethel asked.

“Do you see a good-sized brown-paper parcel about, anywhere? The string’s loose—it’s been opened. Ah, there it is, on the bureau; just bring it here, will you.”

Ethel brought the parcel, and after a good deal of fumbling, Mr. Henning drew out a small stern-looking volume. This he opened, and on the title-page wrote an inscription. He handed the book to Oliver.

“There, Oliver,” he said, “this is my latest Manual. I hope that some day you may find it useful. I very rarely give presentation copies. I do not approve of the custom. It tends to impoverish the giver and pauperize the receiver. But as you have already begun to pauperize me, it is only fair that I should return the compliment.”

“He meant it for a wild, roystering joke,” Oliver assured Mrs. Bannock, “and I really believe it’s the first he’s ever made. He seemed quite exhausted after hatching it, and I don’t wonder.”

## XI

Again Oliver found himself left to his own resources. “Isidor” lay at the bottom of a drawer, carefully hidden from sight. Bertie was ferociously busy in the daytime, and his evenings were sacred to Miss Lanyard, who was stopping for a month with an aunt at Richmond. A prolonged course of concerts had made Oliver just



a little weary of them. In these circumstances, it was not very wonderful that his mind began again to revert to Mount and all that he stood for. On and off, he had seen a good deal of Mount since the latter returned from Sicily, but he had not taken up again the round of nightly pleasures which still lived so vividly in his memory. Why he had not done so, he would have been puzzled to say. Was it fear, or simply inertia ; conscience, or laziness ? At any rate, he commended himself for his abstention, and rewarded himself by spending long hours in recalling, even to the minutest detail, the worst incidents of what he still called his infatuation. So the hours were spent that should have been devoted to "Isidor." Ethel's visit had been a real diversion. His thoughts, pleasant and wholesome ones, came back, with a spring, to the present. What a charming girl she was, so frank, so simple, so grateful for the least kindness, and yet so quick, and bright, and self-possessed ! In her presence the past ceased to trouble him. The sins of his boyhood and the failures of his youth were alike forgotten. He had found someone to understand, and to sympathise with him, and it was a delightful experience.

Ethel's departure was a heavy blow, and he tried hard to meet it by returning to his literary work. "Isidor" was hopeless. He had been a fool to start a long flight before his wings were strong. Short stories were surely within his powers—look at the stuff in the magazines ! He

set to work and in a week had written two. They were typed and sent out in hot haste, one to the *Cornhill*, the other to *Blackwood*. He sent stamps for return, though he felt confident they would not be needed. But they were, and in his disappointment he vowed that he would never try again. The sense of his own miserable ineptitude sickened him once more. The humiliation, the misery, were absolutely unbearable. He went straight to the Arts and Letters, and his heart bounded as he saw Mount and Lipstein going in, just before him.

This time he took what Lipstein called "a header." His reputation for wealth was a passport to the refinements of vice, and he used it freely. Here, at least, he was an undoubted success. His money, his liberality, his good looks, his music, all helped to win him a real popularity in these strange groves of Astarte, a popularity all the more genuine because he was no pigeon to be plucked. Some thin vein of Martin's business shrewdness showed itself in unexpected outcrops. He was never vicious beyond his means.

His health suffered, but not to the extent that might have been expected. Here, his constitutional timidity was a safeguard. An untoward symptom filled him with apprehension and sent him hot-foot to Dr. Vaisey, who knew him well enough to add some good advice to his tonics. Still, Mrs. Bannock saw a change in him and urged him not to work so hard in town, but to take up gardening and other country pursuits.

“You’re injuring your health with all that literary work,” she said, “and there’s no need for you to do it. I want to see you comfortably married and settled as a country gentleman. You can always write for your own amusement, of course.”

“I’m not so selfish,” he answered. “I’d much rather write for other people’s amusement.”

“Do it for both, then,” she said. “By the way, I had a letter from Ethel last night. They’ve gone to Spain, of all places. From what Ethel says, I believe it’s to get another of those ‘Manuals’ ready. I can see she hates going, in fact she says how much she’d like to see Pinner again. But why shouldn’t you run over to Spain? It would do you all the good in the world.”

Oliver laughed.

“No,” he answered, “I couldn’t stand Uncle Henry in the act of preparing a Manual of Spanish. Why, I should have to learn it myself! Besides, there’s nothing the matter with me.”

“Nothing serious, of course, but you do look run down. Do you know you’ve hardly had a quiet, restful Sunday in the country since Ethel was here.”

“But I’ve had a lot of Tuesday-to-Fridays instead,” he answered, “and that’s better still.”

It was quite true. He had practically given up the Sunday visits. The Church services, and especially the Communion, had, he felt, become impossible for him. Even as it was, his con-



science gave him hours of acute discomfort. Indeed, at this time his life seemed to have sunk into a well-worn round of puny effort leading up to inevitable and disgraceful defeat. Often, the day would begin with fervent vows and resolutions, followed, for an hour or two, by a certain exaltation of mind and heart. About noon, perhaps, his imagination would begin to wander—discreetly at first, then boldly—into the forbidden paths. Pleasant memories would gradually merge into still more pleasant anticipations, and before the afternoon was over he was waiting eagerly for a tempter, or putting himself blithely in the way of temptation. And yet, all the while he was conscious of something being enacted in the background, as it were, between himself and Someone, he protesting vehemently that this would be the last, the very last time, and Someone turning towards him a shining but inscrutable face—half pity, it might be, or contempt, or—but rarely—wrath.

## XII

Walking home one night—or rather, morning—from Lipstein's rooms in York Terrace to Westminster, Oliver was caught in a sudden and unusually violent rain-squall. He was accompanied by Bateman, who, besides being as strong as a bull, was on this occasion so well advanced in the genial stage of intoxication as to accept a drenching with serene indifference if

not with positive enjoyment. They were lightly clad, in evening dress, with thin overcoats and patent-leather boots. There was no vehicle in sight, and it looked to Oliver as though the storm might be a long one. Their umbrellas were of little use, for the wind drove the rain fiercely first from one quarter, then from another, and in a few minutes Oliver felt at every step, from his knees down, the cold clinging of wet cloth. So acute was his discomfort that he gave up answering or listening to Bateman's tireless flow of talk, which he found almost as depressing as the rain. A minute or two before they reached Queen Anne's Mansions the rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and at the entrance it became obvious that Bateman was desiring and expecting an invitation. This, however, Oliver was determined not to give, but it was nearly ten minutes before he could rid himself of the portly incubus whose good stories had by this time become so excessively good that they made Oliver feel sick.

At last Bateman, who insisted on solemnly taking off his soddened glove to shake hands, was got rid of, and Oliver was free to go to bed. He stayed up a few minutes to make himself a cup of tea, and drank it shivering. Then he dropped on his knees and swore a vehement oath, which he called a prayer, that never again would he offend. After which he fell asleep, and woke an hour later with a violent headache.

In the morning, after many wakings and brief intervals of uneasy sleep, he got up, feeling a

little better. As the day wore on, however, the headache and feverishness increased, and becoming frightened he determined to go to Pinner at once. By the time he reached Bannockburn he was really ill, and made no demur when Mrs. Bannock urged him to go to bed and have the local doctor fetched. The next day he was in a high fever and delirious.

When he came to himself, out of what seemed a long and heavy sleep, he did not at first recognise the room in which he lay. So confused was he that his first demand was for "Miss Arkwright." In answer to this, a tall, grave-looking nurse came quickly but softly to the bed.

"Whom do you want?" she asked, her voice hardly above a whisper.

His answer was another question—"Who are you?"

She smiled—the professional smile.

"I am the day nurse. You have been very ill, but you will soon be well now."

He lay still, his forehead puckered in a little frown. He was trying to piece together these strange circumstances with his former life. But the effort tired him, and he closed his eyes and gave it up. "I don't know you," he muttered.

"But you know me, Cousin Oliver, don't you?" said another voice, very clear and distinct.

His eyes opened quickly. "Ethel!" he exclaimed in a tone of relief. "Ah, I remember. But are you a nurse? Where's your bib thing?"



It was her turn to smile.

“They won’t let me wear one,” she said. “I’m only an amateur.”

She spoke in her ordinary tone. Her voice was one of her assets and it soothed Oliver, while the nurse’s whisper had puzzled and alarmed him.

“I like to hear you talk,” he said. “What’s the matter?”

The nurse looked hard at Ethel and made a little grimace intended to convey, “Be careful—don’t tell him the truth.”

Ethel glanced at her and turned to Oliver.

“You’ve had pneumonia,” she said, “double pneumonia, I think. But you’ve turned the corner. You’re not to talk, just yet, or you’ll get me into a row.”

Now he smiled—for the first time, and gave her a little nod.

“I’m awfully sleepy,” he said, “and that beastly headache’s gone.”

### XIII

Oliver made a slow recovery. As soon as he came to himself, he insisted on having Dr. Vaisey to see him. From him, he felt sure, he would have not only the best treatment, but also the truth. The doctor came, made a few suggestions to the local practitioner, and spoke very plainly to the patient.

“Look here, young man,” he said, “I ought to

know something about you by this time, and I tell you this about yourself. You're not so weak as you used to look, and you're not so strong as you seem to think. You've been trying too many experiments, and if you want to make old bones you'll have to find another hobby. You understand, I can see by your capillaries."

"Give me something to cure blushing," Oliver demanded.

"Not I. It's too good a witness."

Oliver knew the doctor well enough to understand that his warning was no joke. And in his weakness and depression it came with double force. Death was not an agreeable prospect, and he quite realised that this time his feet had been on the borderland. He made no resolutions: he felt there was no need for them. He must live, whatever happened; he simply durst not die.

During his convalescence Ethel was invaluable. She read to him, sang, taught him picquet—"the only thing Uncle Henry's taught me that's worth learning," she confided to him—she wrote business letters at his dictation, and when he was at a loss for a word or a turn of expression, she was wonderfully quick and deft in supplying the deficiency. She was so good-tempered, so resourceful, so untiring, that neither Mrs. Bannock nor Oliver himself could praise her enough.

"I really don't know what I should have done without you," he said to her one day, "but what's happening to poor Uncle Henry?"

“ Oh, Lizzie’s looking after him,” she answered lightly, though he fancied he could detect just a faint note of anxiety. “ But what they’re doing at home without Lizzie, I really don’t know.”

“ Is Lizzie like you ? ” he asked.

“ Not a bit. She’s half as clever, and twice as good.”

“ You’re quite good enough for us—isn’t she, Auntie ? ” he said, appealing to Mrs. Bannock.

“ Yes, indeed,” said that good lady. “ We should be very ungrateful if we didn’t think so.”

“ It was awfully good of you to come,” he declared.

“ I was sent. Uncle Henry was dreadfully upset when he heard that you were really ill, and he packed me off, almost at a moment’s notice.”

Oliver was silent for some little time. Then he said, softly, as if speaking to himself,

“ There’s a lot of good in life, after all.”

Mrs. Bannock, who was getting a little deaf, did not hear the remark, but Ethel did, and her eyes brightened.

This was on a Wednesday. The following Monday was Ethel’s birthday. Mrs. Bannock had been up to town to buy a couple of presents. Her own gift was a glove-box with half a dozen pairs of the best. Oliver had asked her to bring for him a gold chain-purse. With both of the presents, Ethel seemed to be delighted.

“ It’s a sovereign purse, isn’t it ? ” she asked. “ It’ll be a long time before I have enough to fill it.”



This time she let a little note of wistfulness be heard under the seemingly careless words.

There was quite a budget of letters by her plate. She passed one letter across to Mrs. Bannock.

"Recalled," she said. "Leave of absence cancelled."

Oliver's face fell.

"But there's Lizzie," he exclaimed.

"She's recalled too. I knew they wouldn't be able to do without her."

"When?" he asked.

"I'm to meet Uncle in Paris on Wednesday."

"I don't know what we shall do without you," he said.

And Mrs. Bannock, when she had read the letter, chimed in with louder lamentations.

A few minutes before lunch, as Ethel came downstairs, she noticed that Oliver's study door was half open.

"Is that you, Cousin Ethel?" he called out.

"Yes," she answered. "Do you want anything?"

As she spoke, she looked in. He was writing at his table.

"Do you mind shutting the door?" he asked.

"You're quite mysterious," she said.

"There's no mystery," he answered, smiling, but she could see that he was embarrassed. Then a sudden thought brought the colour to her cheeks. "It's only this," he went on. "Have you got that silly little purse I gave you?"

She took it from her pocket and handed it to him. He opened it, put in a small much-folded piece of paper, and gave it back.

"Now, that's *really* mysterious," she said. "Is it a charm?"

"It's nothing," he mumbled, still more embarrassed, and blushing vividly. "Don't look at it now. Keep it for Paris."

"Impossible!" she said. "You know poor Eve's reputation."

She opened the purse and unfolded the paper. It was a cheque for £500 drawn in her favour.

"Oh no, Cousin Oliver!" she exclaimed, laying it down on the table. "It's tremendously kind of you, but I couldn't think of taking it."

"Nonsense;" he urged, "I've got more money than I know what to do with. Why shouldn't you have a little? It's all in the family. Surely, between cousins——"

"Ah, but we're not proper cousins, you know," she interrupted. "We're really strangers—well, friends then, but nothing more."

"There!" she said to herself, as soon as the words were out of her lips, "you'll never have a finer opportunity if you live to be a hundred." Almost the same thought occurred to him. There was a distinct pause which they both felt was momentous. Then he spoke.

"Do take it, please. It would give me such a lot of pleasure."

Her face showed no sign of the disappointment she felt, or of the anxiety that racked her as she

watched the cheque. It was a fearful risk she was taking, but she was no coward.

“ I shall never forget your kindness,” she said, “ but I can’t take this. It’s just a question of feeling, I know, but I’d sooner trust feeling than reason. You’re not in a position to give, and I’m not in a position to take.”

She was watching him very closely, without seeming to. She could read plainly the admiration in his eye. Indeed she felt, as she heard the sound of her own voice, that she was carrying herself uncommonly well and quite deserved admiration. The thing that puzzled her was his reticence. She had given him at least two admirable opportunities, and he had let them both slip. Was she to lose the cheque as well ? ”

He took the cheque from the table and folded and unfolded it while he looked straight in front of him, with an expression on his face that completely baffled her. Suddenly he turned to her.

“ Cousin Ethel,” he began.

Her heart gave a leap. There was a change of tone quite unmistakable. And just at that very moment Mrs. Bannock put her head in at the door.

“ Come, young people,” she said. “ Luncheon is on the table. Didn’t you hear the gong ? ”

Ethel looked round with the prettiest air of penitence.

“ Oh, Aunt Alice, I *am* so sorry. Have we kept you waiting ? ”

But behind her unsuspecting hostess’s back



she clenched her little fist and registered a vow.

“Silly old marplot! I’ll take precious good care we don’t have you quartered upon us!”

#### XIV

Ethel left for Paris the next day. Oliver made no attempt to renew the interrupted conversation, but when saying good-bye he offered her an envelope. Longing to take it, she steeled her resolution and shook her head, but made no effort to conceal the genuine tears that filled her eyes. He turned back to his room filled—as she meant him to be—with self-reproach.

He believed that he had surprised her secret. Simple as a child, she had betrayed it, and he felt that he had treated her abominably. Her bright face, her unfailing good-temper, the cleverness she showed in half a dozen directions, her unselfishness, all these had made Bannockburn so pleasant, that when she was there he had very seldom been away. Her devotion when he was ill ought to have opened his eyes, but he had been content to accept the story of Uncle Henry’s sending her.

He was really fond of her and he felt sure she would make a pattern wife. Mrs. Bannock, he knew, was eager to see them married, and Uncle Henry, it was pretty evident, was of the same mind.

Only one obstacle stood in the way, but that

seemed to him insuperable. This breakdown of his health, coupled with the doctor's warning, had come upon him as a great shock. Once more, but now with a new seriousness and intensity of vision, he had reviewed his life. He saw it as a whole—as far as it extended—and it was emphatically not good. Everywhere was the fatal flaw of weakness. Passion, he realised, may be tamed, obstinacy diverted into the right direction, impetuosity curbed by the hand of time, but weakness—time has no cure for that. It is the traitor within the gates, ready to fling them open at the call of every vice. Lying still in the darkness, he had recalled a hundred broken vows, and his soul had shrunk and sickened at the memory. There and then, born of self-disgust, almost of self-hatred, one more resolution had come to birth, and this at any rate he *would* keep—no child should ever call him father and curse him for the heritage of such a character. As he slowly regained his health, both Mrs. Bannock and Ethel were struck by a change in him. A strange gravity, deep but gentle, seemed to overshadow him, as though he had aged almost out of knowledge. They waited patiently to see the shadow lift, but they waited in vain. Then Ethel had to leave, and Mrs. Bannock persuaded him to spend a month in Devonshire and Cornwall.

The impression made by his illness did not wear off as he had half hoped, half feared it would. If anything, it deepened. Perhaps, unconsciously, he was indebted to his deep con-

stitutional timidity. This time the burnt child had learned his lesson. The very thought of the fire made him afraid.

Side by side with this fear of evil had grown in his heart a loathing for the duplicity that had become a second nature. He felt an intense, indescribable longing for some one with whom he could be perfectly frank and natural. The boon was denied him, and for that, he had to thank—himself. Of all his friends there was not one whom he had not hoodwinked with a success which he now felt to be his own undoing. Ethel was a dear, simple child, unable to realise, even afar off, the nature of his temptations. Mrs. Bannock, Uncle Henry, Bertie Squires—they had not the faintest idea of his real character—nor, for the matter of that, had Mount or any of his crew. Of all living creatures two only, he believed, had formed any correct idea of him as he really was. One—his father—was dead; the other—Dr. Vaisey—was hardly more than an acquaintance. But he felt, with something like the imperious force of an animal instinct, that in the full, free, frank expression of his true self to another lay his one hope of salvation. Meanwhile his resolve still held good, not to pass on to other shoulders the burden he had found well-nigh intolerable. This was the obstacle that stood in the way of Mrs. Bannock's fond desire and of his own strong inclination.



## XV

One result of Oliver's illness was that he determined to give up his flat in town. Accordingly, soon after his return from Cornwall, he went to Queen Anne's Mansions to make arrangements for the removal of his furniture. It was while he was on this errand that he was surprised by a call from Cutlin. He had seen very little of this worthy since the party to which Mount had taken him, and when they had met, there had been little cordiality in their relations. Yet there was something fine in his whole-hearted enthusiasm for, and devotion to, the ungainly Paris, and there was also an air of brusque sincerity about the man that made a strong appeal to Oliver in his present mood.

The visitor wasted no words on courtesies, but went straight to the point.

"I think you met Nesta Somervil at one of my shows, didn't you?"

"I did," Oliver said. "She danced. It was wonderful."

"Oh, very! Well, she's a friend of mine"—he laid a strong and, as Oliver thought, disagreeable emphasis on the "friend." "She's ill, or fancies she is, and we're going abroad next week. Somehow or other, she came across your name the other night, and when I told her you had been to the studio she got quite excited and would have me try to get you to call on her."

"I wonder why?" said Oliver, half to himself.

“ I don’t. She’s as full of fancies as a herring is of bones, and in the long run it saves time and breath to let her have her way at once. So will you go, or won’t you ? ”

“ I’ll go, if you’ll give me her address.”

“ There it is, then.” And he laid a card on the table.

“ When would she like me to call ? ” Oliver asked.

“ She’s written some days and times on the card,” he answered.

As soon as his visitor had gone, Oliver reproached himself for having once more dallied with temptation, but he had promised, and he would be upon his guard. He had been greatly interested in Nesta Somervil and had been quite upset when he heard from Mount of her relations with Cutlin. Now his interest was reawakened by this message, and, whatever the consequences, he would certainly keep the appointment.

On the first of the offered dates, therefore, early in the afternoon, he found himself on the doorstep of a very smart house in Raymond Gardens, South Kensington. Three brass plates with separate bells showed that the house was let in flats, and on the first-floor plate was the name “ Somervil.” A small boy in buttons opened the door and, on seeing his card, showed him at once into a room furnished comfortably and in excellent taste.

The room was empty, but it had evidently been occupied a moment before. A low chair was drawn up close to the fire, and on it was an

open book half covered by a little lace-edged handkerchief. Oliver bent down curiously to see what literature was in favour here. It was Zola's *L'Œuvre*. As he rose, his eye caught a large framed drawing that could, he felt sure, be the work of only one artist in the world. It represented a hugely fat Falstaff of a man dressed in a ridiculous garment like a child's pinafore, and seated in a frail wickerwork boat tossed on a lively sea close to a great smooth rock. On this stood three bare, bony females hideous in face and figure, beckoning and leering towards the boat. In the left-hand corner was written in a strange, angular script, "Les Sirènes," and then an initial, "P." While he was regarding this characteristic work of art, the door opened and Nesta Somervil came in.

Her black silk dress was severely plain, relieved only by a gold necklet and a scarlet carnation fastened at her breast. But the face was unmistakable, and again it thrilled him with a strange, unaccountable emotion.

Without a word of greeting, she walked to the mantelpiece, took up a small framed photograph, and handed it to him. He saw at a glance that it was a portrait of himself as a small boy of eight or nine.

"Is that right?" she asked, sitting down in the low chair and pointing him to another chair opposite.

"Yes," he answered, shortly and ungrammatically, "that's me."

"Then you remember me?"



He had hardly sat down, but he sprang up in great excitement.

“ You don’t mean to say you’re really Sophie Zanetti ? ” he exclaimed.

She smiled, but he thought there was pain behind the smile.

“ She died years ago ; ” she answered, “ ages, I mean, but I’m her grave. Are you Oliver, or only his grave ? ”

He sat down again and studied the quaint, old-fashioned portrait. It was a pretty, appealing little face, but beneath the soft contours he could see quite plainly the hateful weakness. He leaned forward and laid the photograph on a table.

“ I’m afraid I’m Oliver,” he said, “ and I’m still more afraid that he’s immortal.”

To this, she made no direct reply, but looked at him steadily, till his eyes dropped.

“ I didn’t mean to stare you down,” she said, “ but I was trying to see how much is left of the little boy I knew.”

“ Too much,” he replied gloomily.

“ I can’t see much, but there must be something, for ever since that night when you came to the studio, your face has haunted me.”

He smiled.

“ Just as yours did me. At first, I couldn’t think why. Then I found that when I recalled your face, Sophie came too. But I never really thought you *were* Sophie.”

“ I saw a sketch of you with your name on it, among some of Geoffrey Mount’s drawings. He’s a friend of yours ? ”

“ Yes,” Oliver answered, not too readily.

“ And so you’re in with all this crowd ? ” she said. “ No one would think it, to look at you. And yet I don’t know. I have seen one or two sheep that simply couldn’t keep away from the goats.”

“ I mean to, though.” He spoke almost in a whisper.

“ Why ? ” she asked quickly.

“ Well, I’ve had a bad illness—” he began, but she interrupted him with an impetuous outburst.

“ Oh no ! ” she cried. “ Don’t slander yourself. If you’re tired of the game, give it up and have done with it, but don’t run whimpering to God because you’ve got a hole in your lung. That’s coward’s virtue, which is worse than vice.”

She spoke with such vehemence that Oliver was startled, and showed it.

She laughed.

“ That’s the old Sophie at any rate ; you must have brought her to life again. I haven’t had a flutter like that for a long time.”

He looked at her with a new expression on his face.

“ Yes,” he said, “ that is the old Sophie. I’ve never forgotten how you flew at me because I told a lie. I made up my mind there and then that I would never do it again—to you, I mean. If you hadn’t gone away, I believe I should have been very different. I don’t think I could tell you a lie now.”

She leaned her arms on her knees and bent forward, looking into the fire.

"You were a dear little fellow," she said softly, "I can remember so well how fond I was of you. We were both of us rather nice children, and now——"

She broke off abruptly, and they were silent for two or three minutes. Then she suddenly began again :

"Life can be very cruel, can't it ? But it's the surgeon's cruelty, not the brigand's. You can't trust men and women, you can't trust yourself, but Life you can trust."

He shook his head.

"I'd sooner trust you," he said.

She looked round at him with a new attention.

"Trust me ? My poor boy, do you know what I am ? I'm the favourite in Arthur Cutlin's select harem—that's about the kindest way it can be put. I'm not complaining of him. He's an unusually generous and considerate Turk. He's done what a good many husbands won't do—he's made me independent of him, as far as money is concerned. And in his own fashion he's perfectly straight and downright. In some ways he's a brute, and he's got a brute's temper, but to that madman Paris he's been an angel—there's no other word for it."

She spoke very fast and ended abruptly. He felt her eyes fixed upon him. His own were cast down, but the moment she ceased, he spoke, his voice low but eager.

"I don't care what you are to him. To me



you're the one person on the earth that I can talk to quite freely. I want to tell you about myself."

"Very well," she said in a gentler tone, "you shall tell me what you please, but I'm a woman, I'm going abroad next week—with him, and I'm ill. I don't suppose we shall ever meet again—not in this ramshackle old world at any rate. I don't want you to think me worse—or better—than I am. I'm not going to tell you what the papers would call my 'story,' but I'll tell you this. Poor mother lost all her money before she died, and I was left almost penniless. We had no relatives that would—or could—help me. I made a hard fight for a year till I was half starved, losing my looks, losing my health, and with no chance of making any provision for myself. I knew what that meant in a few years' time. I met a man who found out that I'd got a voice and some brains, and he offered to train me for the Halls and keep me till I was ready. He made his terms and I accepted them. I did it with my eyes wide open, and I saved my body at any rate. In the same circumstances, I should do the same to-day. I knew I should have to pay for it, and the account's coming in, very soon. Now tell me about yourself—as much as you want to."

"There isn't much to tell," said Oliver, "but I know you'll loathe me when I'm done, almost as much as I loathe myself. I'm one of the prudent people who just manage to keep the safe side of the hedge. I was brought up by an aunt who was good as a mother to me. She's

very good herself, and she's always thought me very good too. I've let her think it—I suppose I've made her think it. Then, my father, who was looked upon as a very rough, grasping man, was most wonderfully kind and generous to me. But from the first I was a little coward. I was, you know, when you took me up, and the older I grew, the worse I got. At school I cheated, and at home I was always making up symptoms and cheating the doctors. Then I got a real illness which frightened me and sent me—as you said a minute or two ago—whimpering to God. I went into my father's business and made a fool of myself there, just as I had done at school. Then I took up drawing and went to some classes where I met Mount, and he took me under his wing. That was the first time I seemed to feel my feet and not to be a failure. You see, my father always kept my pockets full, so people were pleasant to me, and I went on, step by step, till there weren't many more steps to be taken. And all the time I was living two perfectly different lives and taking in two sets of people. The only one that knew—at least I believe he did—was my father; I found it out just before he died. But it didn't seem to trouble him. And then the resolutions I made!—it turns me sick to think of them—and an hour or two afterwards, back again like a mouse to the bait. After my father died, I did think I had shaken myself free, but it was no good; in a few months I was worse than ever. Last of all came a breakdown and a doctor's warning that, between

them, gave me a horrible fright. Since then I've given Mount and his lot a wide berth. But how long is it going to last? I had another fright when Cutlin came to see me, the other day. I thought, 'There I am; back again.' But it was only your message that brought me."

"I'm glad I sent it," she said, "and I'm glad you're still on the safe side of the hedge. That's a man's privilege, isn't it?"

There was a touch of bitterness in the question, the first she had shown.

"Yes," he answered, "I know. It's horribly unjust."

"Never mind," she said, "take advantage of your privilege. Marry a good girl and forget the sirens. There they are"—she pointed to the picture—"Paris has his moments of inspiration; he looked under the powder."

He shook his head.

"No! One Oliver Grimwood is enough, and more than enough. I made up my mind to that, when I was shaking off the last of my illness."

"Is she pretty?"

A denial of her existence was on the tip of his tongue, but he just saved himself.

"Yes," he answered. "Not exactly beautiful, but bright, and jolly, and clever."

She nodded.

"I know. And has she got a heart?"

"Oh yes," he declared. "She's an angel when anyone's ill."

"Then marry her, as soon as ever you can. Tell her first what you've told me—dare you?"



He paused for a minute before answering.

"I doubt it," he answered. "I believe you're the only one I could tell. She didn't know me when I was six."

"That does make a difference," she admitted. "Well, marry her, and tell her bit by bit."

He shook his head.

"I daren't," he said. "Weaklings have no business with fatherhood."

"Nonsense!" she exclaimed brusquely. "That's spoken like a weakling. You have your privilege; use it to the utmost. Life is still before you; trust it. Lay hold of it and make it bless you. Depend upon it, it will. Ah!" she went on, her voice changing as she watched his face intently, "I know what you're thinking—how about me? Well, I *do* trust Life. I've played the game and broken the rules, and Life has seen that I paid the penalty. That's quite right—there's nothing to whine over, or complain about, in that. And now that I've paid, it's coming to the rescue in the only way possible, and setting me down at another board. But your game isn't half finished yet. Play boldly, and trust Life, Oliver."

She stood up, and held out her hand. Oliver took it, but did not let it go. There was something more he wanted to say, but the words were slow to come. At last he spoke.

"I want to ask you to do something and I'm afraid to. But you tell me to be bold and I'm going to try. It's—it's—well, it's like this. My father left me a heap of money, far more than

I know what to do with, and besides, I get a regular income from his old business. There the money is, invested, and doing no good to me or to anyone. But if—if you would have—I mean take some of it—say five thousand—I should never miss it, and it might make you—I don't know how to put it as I want to, but it might make you feel a bit more independent. There! I've said it clumsily, I know, but I do want you to say yes, tremendously. Do, please, for the sake of auld lang syne!"

There was no mistaking the eagerness in his voice. A moment before, she had thought his face beautiful but effeminate. Now, a new expression transfigured it. For just a moment a thought flashed across her mind, of what might have been. The rare tears shone in her eyes, but they were not tears of disappointment.

"You dear boy!" she exclaimed. "Didn't I tell you that Life is to be trusted? I can't take your money. I told you he has been generous, and I am bound to him till—till the board is folded and put away on the shelf. But you have dipped your fingers in water and given me a taste of real joy—the first, for I don't know how long. Good-bye, Oliver. Thank you a thousand times. Marry, be happy, and don't forget my article of faith—trust Life."

She put her hands on his shoulders, and kissed him on the lips.

"That's what I used to do, in poor old Noah's Ark," she said, "and this is just as innocent."

## XVI

His interview with Sophie made a profound impression upon Oliver. It was not merely that a strong nature had reasserted itself, after a long interval, over a weak. Looking back, he felt keenly and bitterly the tragedy of her fall. But the amazing thing was the way in which she herself faced the situation, admitted her fault, yet evidently thought it still not wholly beyond some ultimate retrieval. Whatever else had failed, it was not her courage.

It had done more, this courage of hers, than sustain her own self-respect. It had kindled the spark in his heart, if not to a blaze, at least to a clear shining. He had come forth from his long ordeal humiliated, defeated, and yet—little as he deserved it—almost unscathed. The goodly fellowship of honourable men and women was still open to him. His means were ample. His health only needed a wholesome care and self-restraint. Love itself stood waiting for him—the safest haven for a storm-tossed spirit. Surely it was only reasonable to see in all this the evidence of divine forgiveness. After all—the thought came into his mind more than once—he *had* been regular in his religious observances, and there might be more in that than he had realized. Yes ; he would follow Sophie's advice. He would trust life, only that was rather a heathenish way of putting it. Say rather, he would trust God.



The morning after his visit to Sophie, he received a note from Uncle Henry. "I called at your rooms," it ran, "yesterday afternoon, but found you out. I will look in again to-morrow about 4.0 P.M. If you have any engagement, please wire."

Oliver was surprised, for he had not heard of Mr. Henning's return to England, but he had no engagement, and was anxious to hear news of Ethel.

Uncle Henry was looking well in health, but though unusually cordial he seemed embarrassed, and indulged in a good deal of humming and hawing, till Oliver asked after Ethel. Then he let himself go, as if he had been waiting for the introduction of her name.

"Ah, poor Ethel!" he exclaimed. "She's well enough, as far as merely physical health is concerned, but I see a great change in her, lately. She's brooding over something, I'm sure."

"I can't imagine her brooding over anything," said Oliver with a smile. "I should have thought she was far too level-headed to do any such thing."

"She *is* level-headed," Mr. Henning admitted, "that's quite true, and it only makes her present state more remarkable. She seems depressed, and sometimes positively unhappy—such a contrast to what she used to be. I'm glad I didn't let Lizzie go back. I don't know what I should have done without her."

"Have you any idea what's the matter with Ethel?"

“Yes,” answered Uncle Henry, “I have. She’s in love.”

“In love!” Oliver repeated. The words gave him a very disagreeable shock. He had just been making up his mind to follow Sophie’s advice and marry. Ethel, of course, was the girl of whom he had spoken to Sophie. His feeling for her was not ardent. But he admired her, thought her both good and charming, and was very grateful to her for her devotion when he was ill. With her for his wife, his happiness would, he felt sure, be secure. He had thought that she would be willing to make the great experiment with him. If her affections were engaged elsewhere, the experiment must remain untried.

Uncle Henry nodded, with an air of deep, mysterious wisdom.

“Yes,” he said. “I don’t profess to understand it fully myself, because I am not by nature romantic. But the poor child is evidently very hard hit.”

“But isn’t—isn’t her affection returned?” Oliver asked. He was wondering who his rival could be.

Mr. Henning looked up and regarded the young man with an expression of severe disapproval.

“Oliver,” he said, “I did not expect this from you. It really is not at all what I anticipated. It looks—I am sorry to have to say it—it looks very much like heartlessness.”

Then it flashed into Oliver’s mind that it was he himself who was the mysterious rival.

“Do you really mean that she cares for me?” he asked.

“Of course I do,” answered Uncle Henry tartly. “Who else should it be?”

“Well,” said Oliver, “if you’re right, I’m a great deal more fortunate than I deserve to be. I was just trying to make up my mind to ask her the question myself.”

Mr. Henning’s face cleared as by magic.

“My dear Oliver,” he exclaimed, “I am delighted to hear it. I hope you will lose no time in putting the poor child out of her misery. Can’t you come back with me now?”

As it happened, however, Mr. and Mrs. Squires—for Bertie had begun his experiment—were due to dine with Oliver that evening, so the call had to be postponed till the next morning.

Uncle Henry went back smiling and in great content. He had taken a good deal of trouble, but the result fully justified it. He had done a good turn to Oliver, a better to Ethel, and the best of all to himself, which was the really important thing.

The fact was, he had found dear Ethel just a little too masterful. She had ruled the servants splendidly, but he had sometimes felt a suspicion that she was beginning to rule him too, and when she did not get her own way she showed a positive genius for making things unpleasant. Then Lizzie had taken her place for a few weeks, and he had found himself really in clover. The elder sister was neither pretty nor brilliant, but she was an admirable housekeeper and a perfect



listener. He had not the least desire to see Ethel back again in her old place and position. Her marriage offered the only—and a delightful—solution of the problem. No wonder he went home smiling.

## XVII

“And you really think I can make you happy?”

Oliver had looked forward to the interview with a good deal of misgiving. He might have spared his anxiety, for Ethel took the conduct of affairs into her own hands without appearing to do so, and within a very few minutes the great question had been asked and answered. She had taken infinite pains over her toilette and she looked her very best. The joy that shone on her face was quite genuine, and she made no effort to conceal it—she knew how well it became her. The expression of Oliver’s face was harder to read, and it sorely puzzled her. His kisses were warm, his voice was tender, and his words were full of endearments, yet she felt the presence of a strange restraint. “Why can’t he let himself go?” she said to herself, impatiently. She felt it all the more, because her joy seemed to have made her for the moment a stranger to herself. Since her last parting from Oliver, she had been through the worst experience of her life. She had gone back to Uncle Henry to find herself supplanted in what he called his affections by the homely Lizzie, and she

knew enough of him to be sure that he would not hesitate to make the exchange at his own convenience. She had heard nothing from Oliver, and the thought of the rejected cheque had been bitter as wormwood. And then in a moment, it seemed, everything had changed. Uncle Henry had told her, with his most gracious smile, that Oliver was coming to see her. "And I will take care, my dear," the venerable diplomatist had added, "that you are not disturbed." Oliver had come and, almost before she could realise it, her anxieties were removed, the object for which she had been striving so long and so patiently was attained, and from the thorns of imminent failure and defeat she had snatched this sudden and dazzling triumph. Her heart expanded, and all unkindly thoughts spread their wings. Dear Oliver! she would—with God's help—be a good, true wife to him. Uncle Henry, after all, had proved himself her best friend; he would provide for Lizzie, and she would make him happy. Even Mrs. Bannock, whom she had—most unjustly—suspected of trying to keep Oliver from her, now received a kinder judgment. It was only natural that she should want to keep such a boy tied to her apron-string.

"And you really think I can make you happy?"

She threw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, my own dearest," she cried, "how could you be so blind? Haven't you seen that I have loved you almost from the first day I saw you?"

Yes, I don't mind telling you everything now. I'm not going to have any secrets from my husband."

Her voice lingered on the word—it meant so much to her.

He kissed her fondly, yet she was still conscious of that holding back which frightened and vexed her.

"I'm afraid you don't know me as I really am, or at any rate as I have been," he answered, looking down on her with troubled face.

To herself she said, "You've got fifty thousand pounds, you darling!" but to him—and the words were true—

"I don't care in the very least what you have been, and as to what you are, I can trust my eyes and my heart."

"I am terribly weak;" he went on, "in character, I mean."

"We all are," she replied, "only not one in ten knows it, and not one in a hundred will admit it."

He shook his head.

"No, thank God, I'm an exception. But you are strong, and that's my great hope, only it doesn't seem fair. And Ethel, you ought to know, while you can still draw back; I've been very wild."

She nearly laughed. Late hours, and the naughty music halls! Really, he ought to have been a curate. But she checked the impulse, and spoke with gentle seriousness, her eyes lifted to his:



“ Oliver, my dearest, it’s very noble of you to tell me this, but it doesn’t make the least difference, except to make me love you more. Love doesn’t ask for characters and take up references. It sees, and judges, and knows, for itself. If there is any risk, it is proud to take it. I want you, you darling, just exactly as you are, neither better nor worse.”

His face brightened involuntarily, but he went on sternly :

“ I’ve failed in everything I’ve undertaken.”

This time she did allow herself a laugh.

“ Have you ? ” she asked him, holding out her hands. “ Didn’t you hear me say that I love you from the crown of your head to the sole of your foot ? Is that one of your failures ? ”

“ No,” he exclaimed, with a sudden burst of exultation, “ it’s my first success ! ”

## XVIII

There was no reason for any long delay, and the wedding was fixed for the first week in October. Greatly to Ethel’s disappointment it was to be a very quiet affair, for her father could not, and her uncle would not, incur any large expense. She bore the disappointment heroically. Like a prudent general, she was determined to leave nothing to chance. “ There’s many a slip,” she often reminded herself, and until the knot was actually tied she would stand on guard.

One difficulty she found which needed very careful handling. So attentive had she always been to Mrs. Bannock, and so demonstratively affectionate, that neither Oliver nor the old lady herself ever seriously contemplated any separation. Mrs. Bannock did indeed say something to Oliver about their not wanting an old woman as a permanent nuisance, but he only treated the remark as a joke.

“Fancy!” he said to Ethel, “Auntie was talking about leaving us when we set up in partnership.”

Ethel opened her innocent eyes wide.

“Oh, Oliver!” she exclaimed, “does she think she’d be more comfortable by herself?”

“No,” said Oliver, “that’s about the last thing she’d think of. She’d got some ridiculous idea that we might feel freer or something, by ourselves.”

“What did you say?”

“Of course I told her we’d neither of us dream of such a thing. That was right, wasn’t it?”

“I should think so, indeed,” she answered. “Who would have the heart to turn her out, even if we’d wanted to?”

“And we don’t want to, so we’ll tell her we can’t do without her. I must write to Bertie. I’m going to have this house brought up to date, and the firm may as well do it.”

“What are you going to have done?”

“I’m going to have a billiard-room built out on the dining-room side, and a conservatory in front of the drawing-room. That will add a

good deal to what Bertie calls the ‘ amenities ’ of the house.”

Ethel looked down for a moment. Then she said in a quiet, almost indifferent tone :

“ Do you know, Oliver, I don’t think I’d do that. I don’t want you to tie yourself down to a country life—not for good and all, I mean. I shall never be really happy—well, not as happy as I might be, till I see you doing what I know you *can* do—write a great book, or paint a great picture, or compose music that will live. I believe you could do almost anything, if you made up your mind to, and Uncle Henry thinks so too.”

He shook his head a little sadly, but she went on, her voice kindling :

“ I know what you’re thinking about—your failures, as you call them. They’re only the rungs on the ladder you’re going to climb, and I’m going to cheer you on and clap as you get near the top.”

Oliver’s eyes brightened.

“ You little witch,” he said, “ you should let sleeping dogs lie, and now you’ve made one of them prick his ears. Music and painting are no good, but literature—I believe I might be able, some day, to write a book worth reading.”

“ You will,” she cried, “ but not if you live a hermit’s life. You must get into touch with the men worth knowing.”

“ How’s that to be done ? ” he asked.

“ By living among them,” she answered.  
“ Leave this house as it is, and get a little house



or a flat in town. It's what you did before, only then you were lonely ; you wouldn't be lonely now, would you ? ”

The plan was discussed at great length. Mrs. Bannock was secretly disappointed, but, when she saw Ethel's eagerness, supported her, as did Uncle Henry in his own solemn and matter-of-fact way. So Ethel won her first battle, or rather what she looked upon as a preliminary skirmish. *She* was not going to be tied to Aunt Alice's apron-strings !

## XIX

The wedding was not so very quiet after all. So dexterously did Ethel appeal to Uncle Henry's little weaknesses, that at the last he became quite lavish. She induced him to invite one or two of his old Indian friends, of whom the star was Sir Charles Wildbrook, a retired judge. From the moment of his gracious acceptance, Mr. Henning became quite anxious that the function should be carried through in good style, and thenceforward she had no difficulty.

During those last days of her spinsterhood, she was really irresistible. Her radiant good-humour, her thoughtfulness for others, her anxiety to please—never before had these attractive qualities been so much in evidence. And they were the more attractive because now they were spontaneous. She was delighted beyond measure at the success of her plans.

Everything had, so far, turned out exactly in accordance with her wishes, and she felt a desire to thank the whole universe for its complaisance. To Oliver it seemed that now he knew, for the first time, what happiness really meant. He had always looked upon his own weakness and duplicity as unusual and abnormal. In Ethel he saw a strength, a purity, and a child-like frankness that made her an ideal helpmate for such a man as he. Often he blessed Sophie for her advice. He had taken it; he had trusted life, and Ethel was life's answer.

For the wedding, the Rev. John Henning and his wife, with Will and Connie, came up to town from Whittlecombe. The clergyman was very like his brother, but the constant pressure of financial worries had left its mark on face and manner, and there was no trace of Uncle Henry's slightly pompous self-complacency. Will was distinctly plain—very much after the pattern of Lizzie—but Connie was a pretty girl with a good deal of Ethel's brightness. Altogether there were about thirty guests, and—as Will put it—the presents were not to be sneezed at. Oliver's present to his bride was a settlement on her of four hundred a year. "That will make you independent of me, as you ought to be," he said, as he showed her the lawyer's draft. And Ethel, who was, herself, generous, kissed him with rapture, and vowed to herself, once more, that she would make him very happy.

Certainly all the omens did look propitious when the bride and bridegroom came back from

their honeymoon, but, unfortunately, augury has not yet attained to a place among the exact sciences. Their Knightsbridge flat was ready for occupation, but at Oliver's wish they went first for a few days to Pinner. Ethel made no objection. The time had come, she judged, to fight a real battle.

"Will you see Watson, Oliver?" said Mrs. Bannock at breakfast, the day after their arrival. "I want you to tell him about the garden. Are you going to have a fresh lot of perennials? There will be a good many gaps, he says."

"Yes," answered Oliver, "I should like to have a big show of delphiniums. You can't beat them."

"Only they don't last very long; that's the worst of them," said Mrs. Bannock. "What about pinks and carnations?"

"What do you say, Ethel?" asked Oliver. "Which shall it be?"

"I don't think we ought to have a say," she answered, sweetly. "It will be Auntie's garden, not ours. Our garden," she added in the pause which followed, "will be a few window-boxes."

Oliver and Mrs. Bannock looked up in astonishment. They had both understood that the flat was to be only a kind of supplementary home.

"My dear Ethel," said Mrs. Bannock, "of course this is your house—yours and Oliver's. I'm only a sort of housekeeper for you."

Oliver smiled and shook his head. As a matter of fact he had always insisted on paying the



whole of the household expenses, while treating her as mistress. Before he could say anything, Ethel spoke again.

“I’m afraid you must think us very selfish, Auntie dear,” she said. “We have a sweet little home of our own now, where Oliver is going to grow his wings and fly ever so high, till we’re both of us immoderately proud of him. But here you are mistress, of course, and sometimes, we hope, you’ll let us come down as your visitors.”

She spoke with a pretty little air of matronly authority which was very becoming, and the “we” she was careful to use made it difficult for either Oliver or Mrs. Bannock to continue the discussion.

The next day, however, Mrs. Bannock found an opportunity of speaking privately to Oliver.

“How well you both look,” she said. “I’m afraid you’ll neither of you find Knightsbridge as healthy as Pinner. What did Ethel mean yesterday about this not being your home?”

Oliver looked a little worried.

“I think she sometimes speaks impulsively,” he answered, “and says more than she really means.”

Mrs. Bannock shook her head.

“No, Oliver,” she said, “I’m sure she was very much in earnest. I’m afraid she doesn’t like the country, and yet she used to seem so fond of Pinner.”

“She’s got such an idea of my taking to literature, and she thinks I ought to live close to business—that is, editors and publishers. I believe she will buck me up, too. My days of pleasant idleness are over, I’m afraid.”

But he spoke with a new note of resolution, and there was more hope than fear in his voice.

“Well, my dear, whatever is best for you, will please me best,” said the old lady, “and I must say no one could be sweeter and more attentive than Ethel. Fancy her remembering my weakness for lace, and bringing me those lovely things from Belgium.”

Oliver laughed.

“Yes,” he said. “She gave me no peace till she found a cap she really thought you would like.”

“I do hope she hasn’t really taken a dislike to Pinner.”

“If she has, you’ll have to come and live with us,” said Oliver, and closed the conversation with a kiss.

## XX

“She’s wonderfully pretty,” said Bertie Squires.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Squires, “she’s pretty. That’s just the word. You’d never think of calling her beautiful.”

“I’m not so sure of that, my dear. Now that she’s learning how to dress, she may get into the shop windows before she’s done.”

“I shouldn’t wonder a bit. It’s just the kind of thing she’d set her heart on.”

“Light of my eyes! You have your bodkin in poor Mrs. Oliver.”

“Don’t be silly, Bertie. You know you don’t like her any better than I do.”

“If it didn’t seem absolutely incredible, I should say she isn’t exactly enamoured of us.”

“Why should she be? You haven’t got a handle to your name, and I’ve never been presented at Court.”

“Queen of my heart, it is not often you are sarcastic.”

“Well, did you ever see such a collection of people? That stupid old Indian judge was about the most interesting, I should say, and he gobbled so fast, you couldn’t hear a word he said.”

“I was luckier. I took in Miss Connie, and she’s very nearly as smart as her sister. I believe she’ll be even prettier.”

“Well, I pity poor Oliver, and, unless I’m very much mistaken, he pities himself.”

Bertie’s honest face clouded, and the quizzical note died out of his voice.

“He does look bad,” he said. “I know the expression so well. I hoped it had gone for ever. I’m afraid he’s having a bad time. And like a silly fool I made things worse the other day.”

“What did you do?”

“Why, I showed him that letter from the editor of the *Strand* asking for another school story. He congratulated me, like the good fellow he always is, but I could see it gave him the hump horribly. For some reason or other, he never can get his things taken. If they come back the first time, he gets discouraged, thinks they’re rubbish, and stuffs them away in a drawer. I told him I’d half a dozen ‘declined with thanks’



before the first got in. He said, 'I can't imagine how you have the pluck to go on.' And then like an idiotic ass I told him the truth."

"What do you mean, Bertie?"

"Why, I said I've got no more pluck than a flea. It's only my little woman that bucks me up."

"Bertie, how can you? I didn't think you told them."

"It's gospel, my love. When I croak you'll find it written on my heart—if you look."

"If you talk like that, I'll get out and walk home alone. What did he say?"

"He gave me one of his queer looks and said, 'I'm so glad you've got such a good wife, Bertie.' But his voice! It made me want to cut my throat. If you'd heard him, you'd have had to kiss him."

"And have Mrs. Grimwood cutting my throat?"

"Not she," answered Bertie. "She'd have smiled like an angel, but you'd have had to pay, all the same—and he too."

It was only six or seven months after his marriage, and yet already Oliver had seen his dream of happiness go down like a house of cards. Secure in her position, and fully persuaded of her husband's weakness, Ethel no longer troubled to be a little hypocrite. First with Uncle Henry, and then at Pinner, she had found it very arduous work, and it was a great relief to be set free from the constant strain of thinking what she ought

to pretend. Now there was no need of pretence, and she gave nature free rein. The real Ethel showed herself, and a very charming one. For the present, at any rate, she had everything she desired. Her beautifully furnished flat, the carriage that was always at her disposal, the well-filled purse that enabled her to play the pleasant part of a Lady Bountiful at home—these were the solid, tangible rewards for which she had planned, and worked, and acted. She was fond of Oliver, lavish of her caresses, careful of his comfort, as solicitous for his health as even Mrs. Bannock herself. Her good-temper and excellent spirits never failed her, and in her social ambitions she had begun to find a new object of absorbing interest. She had already satisfied herself that neither literature nor art was likely to help these ambitions, and with this discovery vanished every vestige of sympathy with Oliver's renewed aspirations after fame. Not only did she fail to encourage his efforts, she exerted herself to thwart them. She gently derided his devotion to his desk, she claimed his constant escort to dinner-parties and the theatre, and the vacant dates she filled with home engagements. Mrs. Bannock paid one visit to Knightsbridge, where Ethel received her with effusive affection, but—as the sagacious little woman had foreseen—that one visit was more than enough for the bewildered visitor, who, in her own language, found the programme arranged for her “far too hard work for her poor old bones.”

Oliver, too, was soon sick of the artificial life,

and longed for the quiet comfort of Bannockburn or the retirement of his bachelor's flat. Instead, Ethel began to urge him to enter Parliament. At first he laughed at the idea, as an excellent joke, but he soon found with dismay that she was quite in earnest. It was over this contention that the first sharp words passed between them. He was astonished at the tenacity with which she clung to what seemed to him an obviously absurd idea ; she was equally astonished at his venturing to assert his will against hers. Neither formally yielded the point. The specific opportunity which she wished him to seize passed, but she refused to accept defeat, and began to look for a fresh chance.

Meanwhile, another coming event was beginning to cast its shadow before. Ethel had no real love of children and the prospect of motherhood filled her with no rapture, but rather with a feeling of impatience at the interruption which would be caused to her business of pleasure. In Oliver's mind the thought of a child revived the doubts and fears that had made him frame the last and stoutest of his resolutions. When he yielded to Sophie's advice he had fortified himself with the thought that a child of the marriage would have the chance of favouring the mother rather than the father. Now, even that consolation looked a poor one, and he felt himself sinking again into the old apathy of hopelessness. Trust life indeed, when every new path only led back, sooner or later, to the deadly slough of despond !



Meanwhile—how great a contrast!—the valiant little wife, her heart elate with a score of victories, faced without a tremor of fear the annoying but trivial incident in her triumphal march. She made all her arrangements with the perfect mastery of detail that had always distinguished her. Mrs. Bannock, in spite of her years, was eager to welcome Oliver's child, but her offer was put on one side with a little less than Ethel's usual honeyed tact. "I can stand anything but clucking," she said to her husband. "I'm going to have Liz. Uncle Henry must manage with Connie." She announced to her doctor for exactly how long she proposed to lie up, she noted in her diary when—within a week or two—the interrupted round of gaieties was to be resumed, she never tired of rallying Oliver on his long face and solemn voice. "It is a nuisance, I know," she said, "but you needn't look and talk as if I were going into battle."

Alas, poor Ethel! Who is this that comes against you in black armour, on his pale, ill-omened steed? It is a battle then, after all, and of what avail your bland and skilful doctor and your perfect nurse against this grim knight of the hidden countenance? And if he slew the mother in all her pride of health, and vigour, and courage, and spared the puny, weakling babe, who shall say whether it was in kindness or in cruelty that he held his hand?

## BOOK IV

### I

“WHILE there is life, there is hope,” said the doctor, and then, as no one answered, he added, “the recuperative power of a child is simply marvellous.” After which, and a few whispered directions to the nurse, he said “Good night” and walked noiselessly downstairs.

“I suppose there really is no chance—that’s what you meant, isn’t it?” asked Oliver as he held open the hall door.

The doctor shook his head.

“No, I wouldn’t say that. There’s a chance; not a big one, but still, a chance. He might take a turn any moment. One way or the other, you’ll know before long. I’ll look in again, the first thing to-morrow.”

With a heavy, lifeless step, Oliver mounted the stairs again to the nursery. In the corner by the fire was the bassinette, round which stood three watchers. One was the nurse, the second was Mrs. Bannock, the third was Rotha Squires, Bertie’s wife. Oliver walked up to them.

“Now,” he said, “you two are going to bed at once. You are both dead tired. I couldn’t sleep if I tried, so I’m going to sit up. Nurse can

have a nap in the big chair and I'll call her if there's any need."

Both the ladies protested, but Oliver stood firm, and at last they yielded on his promising to summon them if there were real occasion.

Nurse was soon dozing, and Oliver took the chair by the bassinette and looked down on his child. The little skinny face, drawn and puckered as if with pain, appeared to him, as he gravely regarded it, absolutely repulsive. Yet it was his child and, if it lived, embodied the answer to those doubts and fears and hesitations and scruples that had so troubled and perplexed him. He thought of what life had meant to him—the warring against self, ending, times without number, in disgraceful and humiliating defeat; the long, practically unbroken series of failures; the self-conceit of boyhood; the self-mistrust of youth; and now the bitter self-contempt of manhood. This was the gift that in his selfishness he had thrust upon this poor, helpless little atomy. It had been bad enough, passing through the experience himself, but how much more worse to see another—one's own flesh and blood—treading the same miry road, crushed beneath the same intolerable burden. Better, a thousand times, he thought, the swift merciful deliverance and the dreamless sleep.

Then he remembered Ethel. She might have given of her strength, such as it was. Poor Ethel! Of all his mistakes and failures, his marriage now seemed to him the most tragic. He shuddered as he recalled the last few months of



their wedded life. He could not canonize her because she was dead. The ghastly surprise of his disillusion was still a vivid reality. He told himself, over and over again, that they were a pair of hypocrites, he weak, she strong, but he knew quite well that there was another difference. He loathed his duplicity and agonized over it; she wore hers like a Paris model, and gloried in her strength. And that strength he knew would have dragged him at its heels to new depths of degradation. But she had been taken, and the child had been left, left perhaps, he suddenly thought, to avenge her.

He looked down again. The child now appeared to be sleeping quietly, and he could almost fancy that the shadow of a smile flickered over the tiny face. The puckers were smoothed out, and there really was something appealing in the little frail, soft, body, something appealing, and yet—it struck him—something impressive too. He was battling hard, this small envoy from the unknown, to make good his footing in a new, strange world and, perhaps, to deliver his message. The thought arrested him; he hung brooding over it. Message? From whom, to whom? “*My* child,” he muttered, as if challenging some other claim.

As if in answer, the child’s eyes opened and he looked up straight into Oliver’s eyes, the smile more marked than before.

Emotional as Oliver had often shown himself, all through this crisis he had not shed a tear. Life had become for him a cold desola-

tion in which passion, and protest, and even remorse, were frozen on his lips. But now, as he met his child's gaze, he suddenly felt his heart grow warm with a new tenderness. He laid his hand very gently against the soft cheek and experienced a strange thrill at the contact. It might be fancy, but it seemed to him that the smile became at once more distinct and more significant. Something dropped on the child's face. At the same moment Oliver started to find the nurse at his side.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed reproachfully, wiping away the tear, "that's very unlucky,"

To his own astonishment, he answered her quite lightly.

"Oh no, nurse," he said, "it's only a little joke. See how well he takes it."

Indeed, the smile was quite unmistakable. But the nurse was not satisfied, and as an indispensable and therefore privileged person she let her voice show it.

"I am very glad, sir," she replied, "that you are able to make a joke."

## II

One person at any rate benefited by the break up of Oliver's new home. Mrs. Bannock had felt sadly stranded in her big house with no one to share it. She could, and she did, invite friends and relatives to stay with her from time to time, but they were poor substitutes for the



boy she had grown to look upon almost as her own. Now he was with her again, and not only he; the real master of the house had his throne set in the nursery, and Aunt Alice was the most devoted of his courtiers.

A warm friendship had sprung up between Mrs. Bannock and Rotha Squires. Amherst Terrace had its own divinity—a young lady some six months older than Roland—so, at Bertie's instance, Oliver's boy had been named. Bertie and Rotha were constantly at Bannockburn, and their society was a great help to Oliver. But in spite of this, and of the growing interest he showed in his child, the old lady was not satisfied. The difference in her boy troubled her, and all the more, because it was not easily definable. Counting by years, he was still a very young man—almost in the first prime of early manhood. But his expression, his carriage, and his manner of speech—grave, subdued, sometimes a little hesitant—suggested middle age at least. |

As the months went by, his mind began to recover from the shock and to demand some scope for its reviving activities. Bertie urged him to try short stories again

Oliver shook his head.

“It's no good, my dear fellow. I haven't got it in me. I've no ideas for them now, and if I had, I couldn't put them into words.”

“Very well,” said Bertie after a long argument. “Let me have what you've got by you. I'll try and see what I can do with them.”

He carried off three, and in less than a month



one of the three was taken by *Chambers's Journal*.

"You've been up to some hanky-panky," said Oliver, his cheeks flushed, his eyes brighter than Bertie had seen them for many a long day.

"No I haven't," answered Bertie, "I simply put it in an envelope with a stamp for return. You might just as well have done it for yourself."

"I suppose I might, but I sent it to the *Cornhill*, and when it came back it looked such frightful rot. I don't believe it's as bad as I thought. I wonder how it'll look in print. When should you think it'll come out?"

"You'll have a proof first, I expect. Now, if I were you I should begin turning them out by the dozen."

"I don't know about the dozen, but I'll have a try at one."

"I haven't seen him look like that since he came back from his honeymoon," said Bertie to his wife. "You'd never have thought such a thing would have bucked him up so."

"I've known an acceptance buck *you* up a good deal," Rotha answered with a smile.

"Only one, conspicuously, eminently, I won't say absurdly," declared Bertie.

"Which was that?" Rotha asked innocently.

"When you said 'yes' in the summer-house at Eastbourne," answered Bertie with a chuckle and a kiss.

The effect of this small success on Oliver was greater even than his friend imagined. The money, of course, was nothing, the idea of

appearing in print was very pleasant, but it was the simple fact of his having achieved a success at all that really stirred his apathy. He was so ineffably sick of failure, so hopeless of breaking its long continuity, that this little, unexpected piece of good fortune came to him invested with extraordinary significance. It was like the clear shining of a single star amid the broken cloud-wrack of a stormy night. It spoke to him of soft airs and of wide spaces which the moon, if not the sun, might yet fill with light and beauty.

### III

By the time Roland was three he seemed quite to have shaken off his delicacy. He ate, and slept, and grew, splendidly. He was plump and sturdy, with fine pink cheeks and curly hair, and merry, dark eyes. He was always laughing, and was already beginning to show a distinct capacity for mischief. Mrs. Bannock adored him, and the servants were his abject slaves. To all of them he generally showed a frank and gracious condescension, modified—in the case of the cook—by an equally frank yet artful wheedling. To his father, on the other hand, his demonstrations of affection were gentler, and tinged by what sometimes looked like an anxious desire to please. If Mrs. Bannock coaxed him on to her knee, the privilege was never conceded for more than a few moments. But if Oliver lifted him to his lap, Roland would cuddle down and play

with his watch chain, or stroke his hands or face till he was set down again, a process against which he always made at least a mild protest.

If the child was devoted to his father, the father fully returned the affection. But with the affection there was ever present an element of fear. More than one wretched night he owed to the politeness of afternoon callers who professed to see a wonderful likeness between the boy and his father. And sometimes he trembled as he fancied he himself could see something that recalled his own childhood or that reminded him of Ethel. The new tide of love that he felt rising in his heart frightened him, for he could not forget how another tide had ebbed and left his heart bare rock and stone and sand.

One fine Saturday afternoon in July, Oliver was working in his flower-garden, tying up the young dahlias and watering the seedlings. At his heels Roland trotted and stood, holding upside down a ridiculous little watering-pot which had to be refilled every time his father went near the tap.

Through the open French windows of the morning-room came Bertie Squires, holding by the hand a slim little maiden, taller than Roland but not nearly so sturdy.

Roland was the first to catch sight of the visitors. He evidently knew them well, for he ran at once to Bertie and put up his face for a kiss.

“Good!” exclaimed Oliver, coming along the path, “I was hoping you’d turn up. I’ve



got a couple of drawings to show you. Have a ride, Winnie ? ” he said, holding out his hands invitingly.

“ Yeth, pleathe,” lisped the child, her eyes dancing, and Oliver lifted her to his shoulder and trotted carefully across the lawn.

“ We can do better than that, can’t we, Roll ? ” cried Bertie, throwing the boy across his shoulders, pickaback, taking a flying jump over a bed and catching the others half-way down the garden.

“ Go thoftly, pleathe,” Winnie said to her bearer, while Roland kicked hard on Bertie’s back and shouted “ Gee ! Gee ! ”

“ Now,” said Oliver, when both the riders had dismounted, “ here’s the big ball. Roll, you and Winnie have a good game with it till we call you in.”

The children thus disposed of, he led the way to his study.

“ Sit down and light up,” he said, “ while I look out those drawings. They’re for that last tale—“ The Red Scimitar.”

After many attempts Oliver had given up the pen and had fallen back on the pencil. Again he had scored a small success. A fairy tale by H. Squires, with illustrations by Oliver Grimwood, had appeared in *The English Illustrated*, and now Bertie was getting ready for Christmas a small volume of tales which Oliver was to adorn with a number of quaint little drawings. He had developed a very pretty touch in these fanciful little illustrations, and the combina-

tion of story and drawing found quite a ready sale.

"Here they are," he said, after rummaging in a drawer.

Bertie looked at them for a moment.

"Capital!" he exclaimed. "That's just the very brand of wicked dwarf I had in my mind. We're a regular Erckmann-Chatrion, Besant and Rice partnership."

"No," answered Oliver, "it's another sort of partnership. You write the play, and I paint the curtain."

"Well, then, I've had an idea. You write the play and I'll do the curtain. We'll see how that works."

Oliver shook his head.

"You know my plays are always hissed off."

"Give my curtain a chance. Perhaps they'll come, to laugh at it. Couldn't you write something round Roll? I believe I could make a colourable likeness of him."

"That's queer," said Oliver. "I did think of something that had to do with him."

"Scribble it down, then, and send it over. Do you know whom your Roll reminds me of?"

Oliver shook his head.

"Not me, I hope."

"No; your governor. It's something in the eyes, I think. I thought of it again when he was digging his knees into my back and shouting 'Gee!' It's just what I could imagine your father doing, when he was three or four."

Oliver looked pleased.

"I believe you're right," he answered. "I hope you are. I'll have a try at the play, just to see your curtain."

## IV

About this time Oliver was astonished and not a little disturbed by receiving a visit from Arthur Cutlin. Dressed in black, his face was as sombre as his garb, and his manner too was strangely altered.

"You're surprised to see me," he said, "and I don't wonder. It was a rare job finding your address, but I had a message and a little parcel to give you from Nesta and I meant doing it."

"Is she—?" Oliver began.

"She died three months ago; she was right about herself, after all, poor girl. We were married a week or two before the end. She refused for a long time. She was very strange in some ways. She said she had made her bed and she ought to die in it."

Oliver nodded.

"Yes, I can hear her saying it."

"She was the truest, straightest, bravest human creature I've ever known. I did her grievous wrong, but I'm going to make atonement as far as I can."

"You did, you mean."

"No; I'm going to." He paused, and then went on speaking faster, "I've been hard hit—as I deserved to be. There was Paris—you remember him. He was a great genius and I



worshipped him, but I expect I did him as much harm as one man can do to another. He went off his head soon after we got out to Italy, and he died a fortnight after Nesta."

It struck Oliver, as he listened, that Cutlin's voice sounded dead, or at any rate as if it were speaking about one world from another. Yet he also felt instinctively that the man was moved and shaken to the very depths of his nature.

"It's terribly sad," he said.

To his utter amazement, Cutlin broke out into loud, mirthless laughter.

"Terribly sad," he repeated. "Yes, I suppose that's about the best words can do. A woman with a heart of gold, and rotten lungs; and a man with the genius of an archangel, and a maggot in his brain. Oh yes; terribly sad!"

Just at that moment, the door opened and Roll appeared on the threshold. At the sight of the tall, big stranger with the gloomy face, he stopped for a moment, then advanced boldly, his face uplifted with a bewitching smile.

"No, Roll, not now," said Oliver. "Father's busy. Go away to Ellen or Granny."

"Is that your boy?" Cutlin asked, his own features relaxing into an answering smile as he picked him up and set him on a chair. "You're a fine young spark, aren't you?" he went on, addressing Roll.

"Gee! Gee!" cried the boy, who looked upon the chair as an obvious preliminary for a picka-back ride.

Cutlin shook his head.

“No good, old chap. I’m a broken-winded, spavined old crock. Look here, I’ll give you something to play with. You ask Granny, and she’ll show you how to open and shut the box.”

He pulled out a heavy gold hunter, with its chain, gave it to the boy, and lifted him down again. Roll immediately made for the door to show his new treasure.

“No, Cutlin,” exclaimed Oliver, “he’ll drop it, or break it.”

He was hurrying to the door, but Cutlin stopped him.

“Let him be,” he said. “I’ve got half a dozen, and a week hence I shall have no use for any of them. He can’t do more than five shillings’ worth of damage.”

“But it’s absurd,” Oliver protested. “I can’t let you give him a watch and chain!”

“Why not? He made me feel like flesh and blood again for a minute. Let him have it, Grimwood, and when he’s old enough tell him that the man who gave it him said this—The wages of sin is death and God Almighty is the paymaster. That reminds me,” he went on, “this is what I came to bring you from Nesta.”

He took from his pocket a small parcel.

“There it is,” he said. “It’s some of her own trinkets, I think. You were to have that, and I was to tell you that she still believed what she said to you—she was sure it was true. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” answered Oliver. “I am not likely to forget. She told me to trust life.”

“I’d sooner trust death,” said Cutlin. “There’s no uncertainty with him, and it’s uncertainty that plays the deuce with a man.”

“Isn’t there?” asked Oliver. “I’m not so sure about that.”

Cutlin stared at him for a moment.

“Ah,” he exclaimed, “I know what you mean. Death’s all right, but behind death—yes, that’s true. Well, I’ve done with life but I’m not ready for death, so I’m going to try death in life. Good-bye.”

And he held out his hand.

“What do you mean?” Oliver asked, as he shook hands. “What are you going to do?”

“I’m going over to Ireland to end up in a Trappist monastery. I’ve given almost all my property to the Church, and now she’s got to take me as well. I shall think of you as the last station before the terminus. You trust life, and I trust death. Good-bye.”

The packet contained some old photographs—two of Sophie as a child, one of her mother, and the likeness of Oliver that she had shown him. There were two or three framed cards, signed by Dr. Arkwright—modest prizes from the Noah’s Ark. There was also a small morocco-bound Bible, with “To darling Sophie on her tenth birthday, from her loving Mother,” written on the fly-leaf, and a case containing a handsome pearl necklace. On a sheet of paper was written

“DEAR OLIVER,—I send you these because I think you may like to have them for the sake of



old memories. The pearls were my mother's in the old days. I managed to keep them, through all. Perhaps your wife may care to wear them,  
SOPHIE."

## V

On Roland's fifth birthday Rotha brought Winnie over to lunch, and in the evening Bertie came down. They had left Bayswater and were now settled in a charming little house Bertie had built for himself—with the assistance of a fashionable architect—at Harrow. On this occasion they were staying for the night at Bannockburn, and after dinner, when the children were safe in bed, Oliver asked his friends for advice.

"What about education?" he said, looking towards Bertie. "At five, complete ignorance ceases to be attractive—at least that's my feeling."

"He knows a lot already," remarked Bertie. "He's been telling me a heap I didn't know about bees and wasps and worms and beetles. He put what he called 'a lovely beetle' up my shirt-sleeve—my arm itches still. I suppose you'd been stuffing him."

"He asks such a heap of questions. I've had to buy quite a little library of nature books. The worst of it is, they all seem to tell different stories, and he's as sharp as a needle, if you contradict yourself. Winnie can read, can't she?"

"Yes," answered Rotha, "but she's a bit

older, you know. She's had a day governess for nearly six months."

"Does it answer?"

"Oh, admirably. Miss Scott's a perfect treasure. Winnie's devoted to her."

"Then I suppose I'd better begin to hunt for another perfect treasure."

"I should ask the Vicar," suggested Mrs. Bannock.

"Yes," assented Oliver, "that's a good idea. He might know somebody close by."

As it turned out, the Vicar did know somebody—a Miss Paking, an L.L.A. of St. Andrews, and the holder of a host of certificates for all kinds of recondite studies. She lived quite near, and an agreement was soon reached between her and Oliver. She was to come in for an hour every morning and introduce Roland to his letters, or rather his letters to him.

"I hope he'll take to her," said Oliver to Mrs. Bannock. "I rather dread the first lesson."

"She's a member of the Froebel Society," said Mrs. Bannock, who had a great respect for such distinctions.

Miss Paking turned out partly a treasure and partly a terror. She was tall, and slight, and dark, and decidedly interesting in appearance. She took possession of Roland as if he were a small piece of furniture, carried him off to the room assigned them, kept him ten minutes beyond the hour, and brought him back radiant, in a seraphic mood.

"Well, Roll," said his father, as soon as the

governess had gone, "what did you think of your lesson?"

"I like her," he answered. "She gave me choc. and told me tales. She says I'll read in no time."

"Choc. and tales, eh," said Oliver to Mrs. Bannock, "it looks as if old Froebel were a good sort, especially if the reading comes off."

"I think Miss Paking is a very remarkable girl," replied Mrs. Bannock.

It was not long before Oliver heartily agreed with her. There seemed to be few subjects with which Miss Paking had not at least a nodding acquaintance, which she sometimes, perhaps, mistook for intimacy. Then she had a cheerful confidence in her own opinions—convictions, she called them—and a dauntless courage in putting them to the test, that were really impressive if not bewildering. Her suggestions seemed to embrace the whole field of human activity, from a new and perfectly safe yet highly effective method of spanking small children, to the latest developments of cooking by steam, and the intensive culture of garden flowers. Her restless energy noted every household weakness and propounded an immediate remedy.

One afternoon, about three months after Miss Paking's introduction, Oliver, walking into the dining-room, found Mrs. Bannock standing up, facing him, apparently in a state of violent mania. She was standing, or trying to stand, on tiptoe, her arms were stretched out wide, her head was tilted as far back as it would go, and



her eyes were staring in front of her with a most unnatural fierceness.

“ Good Heavens, Aunt Alice ! ” he exclaimed.  
“ Whatever is the matter ? ”

The good lady gave a violent start, dropped her arms, and sank back on the sofa.

“ Fancy your coming in, my dear,” she said.  
“ I thought you were in the garden. I was just doing my exercises.”

“ What exercises ? ” he demanded.

“ They are some Swedish exercises Miss Paking has been showing me. She says they are specially suitable for old people and have a wonderful effect upon them.”

“ I should think they would have. They made you look quite terrific. I should ask the doctor about them if I were you.”

“ Miss Paking says the doctors are against them because they take the place of their prescriptions. I’ve certainly been sleeping wonderfully well the last few nights.”

This was bad enough, but when the governess gave her employer a lecture on the evils of nicotine, presented him with a four-page circular of Dr. Constantine’s Antinic cigarettes and tobacco, and then, whenever she could find or make an opportunity, asked him whether he had ordered any, Oliver felt that the time had come to rebel.

“ Look here, Auntie,” he said, “ our treasure’s too perfect for such commonplace folk as you and I. She’d wake up the War Office, and she’d be a godsend to the South-Eastern, but she’s too high an explosive for a little house like this.”

Mrs. Bannock looked quite frightened.

“What do you mean, Oliver? Send Miss Paking away? I don’t know what she’ll say. I believe she’s very fond of Roll, and he’s certainly fond of her.”

“Yes,” Oliver admitted, “and she’s done a good part by him too. He can read almost anything, and he’s beginning to write quite nicely. And that New Century spanking, or whatever she called it, did him no end of good. I simply can’t hit him, and he knows it, the little monkey. His nerves can stand her, but ours can’t. Has she said anything to you about the Salisbury system?”

“I think she did mention it, but I forget whether it’s hot water and all meat, or cold water and no meat.”

“It doesn’t matter which. I dare say they’d be equally wholesome, and I’m sure they’d be equally nasty. No; she must go, and I’ll tell her so to-morrow.”

Accordingly, the next day Oliver caught Miss Paking in the hall after lessons were over.

“Would you come in here for a moment, please,” he said, standing on the threshold of his study.

“I’ve got that pamphlet I told you of, about the Salisbury treatment,” she said, laying it on the writing-table.

“Ah, thanks,” he answered, “but I wanted a word about Roll. We’re very much indebted to you for all your care and trouble. He’s got on wonderfully lately and does you the greatest

possible credit, but he's getting a big boy, and we think he ought to begin going to school so that he can mix with other boys."

He was going on to expatiate upon the advantages of school, but paused abruptly, stopped by the dismay apparent on the girl's face. Her glib, confident manner seemed quite to have deserted her.

"I don't—don't quite understand," she said. "You don't—do you mean that I'm not to teach Roll any more?"

Her astonishment was so obvious and her expression so woebegone that Oliver felt his heart begin to fail. She was evidently fond of the boy, and it *was* rough on her.

"We don't think it's good for him to be always with grown-up people," he said apologetically. "There's only one other child he ever sees."

She was looking at him very hard, and he felt sure that she was beginning to guess the truth.

"I wonder whether mother's right," she said. "She's very old-fashioned, you know, and she's often told me that I should upset people with what she calls my fads. I suppose I've been an awful little fool, but those things seem so interesting to me. And he's such a dear. When am I to stop coming?"

Oliver was now feeling very remorseful. He had been prepared for a vigorous lecture and perhaps an angry outburst, but this frank recognition of her mistake, and her evident attachment to the boy touched him sharply.

"Oh, there's no hurry at all," he said. "We



thought you ought to know what's in our minds at once."

"You're very kind," she answered. "You always have been, and I shall have learned a lesson."

She looked full at him, and he could see through her smile to the tears in reserve.

A sudden idea struck him.

"Do you know of any school in Pinner for small children?" he asked.

She thought it rather a cruel question, but she was rallying her forces, and she answered with a fine show of composure.

"No, I'm afraid I don't, but I'll look about, and let you know."

Then he fired off his idea.

"Why shouldn't you start a school yourself, and take Roll as the first pupil?"

"I'd love to!" she exclaimed, and then looked down, thinking hard. "No; it's no good," she said after a minute or two. "It would be too much of a risk."

"You mean it would be an expensive experiment?"

She nodded.

"Yes, our house would have to be adapted, or we should have to take another."

"Well, look here," he said. "I think you have done splendidly with Roll, and I should be so glad to have the opportunity of showing you that I'm not ungrateful. Now, if you entertain this school idea, you must let me do the adapting, or if you move, I'll pay the rent for a couple of years

and furnish the schoolroom, and send you your first pupil."

The offer was too good to be refused. The alterations and furnishing cost about £100, which Oliver paid gladly. The vicar sent one of his own children, and recruited three or four more from his congregation, so that Roland spent the first day of his school life with six small companions and came home in a perfect transport of delight, begging to be called an hour earlier the next morning, lest he should be a minute late.

## VI

For three years Roland thrived under Miss Paking's energetic teaching, and the school too thrived. The child developed into a fine, healthy boy, brimming over with life and high spirits. He already showed a fine zest in almost everything he undertook. In arithmetic and nature study he was always easily at the top of his class, and in the other subjects, with one exception, he was never far from it. The exception was music, for which he seemed to have no taste. Into the school games he threw himself with extraordinary ardour, and thus early gave promise of rare excellence at both football and cricket. The strength of his will was attested by half a dozen fierce contests with his teacher, in five of which he had been summarily defeated. The sixth was a campaign rather than a battle.

It arose, of course, out of a wretched little

trifle. He was already an expert in proportion sums, and one morning he found himself face to face with a couple of rather tough problems. After a hard struggle he brought his exercise book to Miss Paking, with the answers in thick, ugly figures.

She glanced at the book.

"Quite right," she said, "but rather untidy. And you haven't stated them right. I want you to do it just as I showed you. It's a much neater way."

Roll's face fell.

"Anyone could understand this," he said.

"Perhaps they might, but this is the best way, and I want you to do it like that. Write them out again."

"Then I shan't get any cricket practice."

His voice suggested trouble, and he certainly was a favourite. Miss Paking temporised.

"Very well. Write them out at home and bring them to-morrow."

His face cleared as if by magic, and he ran off with a most friendly smile.

The next day he came to school beaming, and handed up the re-written exercises. They were a pattern of neatness, but the statements were unchanged. Miss Paking looked at him severely.

"You haven't done what I told you to do," she said.

"You told me to write them out again," he replied.

"What did I mean you to do? Look me in the face,"



He looked full at her, hesitated for a moment, and then said, speaking rather fast,

“ You meant me to do them your way, but mine’s just as good.”

His face showed that he expected a storm. She very quietly tore the paper across and said,

“ Come to me before you go home, this afternoon.”

When he presented himself, she said,

“ Now, Roll, I’m very vexed with you, and there’s no cricket for you this afternoon. You must write those sums out again just as neatly, and you must put the statements my way. Do you understand ? ”

His brow was black, and she had to repeat the question before he answered “ Yes.”

As soon as he reached home he went to Oliver’s room, where he was always sure of a welcome.

“ Father,” he said, “ where’s that old arithmetic book you used to use when you were a boy ? ”

Oliver went to a shelf and took out a thin book.

“ Here it is,” he said. “ What do you want it for ? ”

“ I want to see how they do proportion.”

Oliver had been refurbishing his arithmetic with a view to helping his son.

“ Got any teasers ? ” he asked.

“ No,” answered Roll, “ I only want to see how he does them. May I look at the book here ? ”

“ Of course you may,” answered his father,

and the boy sat down and for a few minutes was absorbed in the book. Then he came across to his father again.

“Is that the way you used to do these sums?” he asked, pointing to a page on which the working of two or three proportion sums was shown.

“I’ve no doubt it was,” Oliver replied, “if it’s there. I always followed the book as closely as possible.”

Once more Roll presented himself and a new fair copy of the sums. A glance showed the governess that the statement was set out in a new way, not the boy’s original form, nor yet the way of the book.

“You know this isn’t right, Roll,” she said.

“It’s the way father does them; I asked him,” he said doggedly.

“Very well,” she said, laying the paper on her desk; “go to your place.” And for the rest of the day she took no further notice of him.

About an hour after school closed, she called round at Bannockburn.

“I’m so sorry, Mr. Grimwood,” she said, “I’ve had three or four little tussles with Roll lately, but nothing serious. Now he seems to have got a real obstinate fit, and I daren’t give in to him.”

She then told the whole story.

“We’ll have him in,” said Oliver, “and hear what he’s got to say.”

He opened the door, and there stood Roll with a red face, but no penitence on it.

Remembering his own boyhood, Oliver in-

stantly thought that Roll had been listening at the door—it was just what he would have tried to do, if he had dared. He had always dreaded, with a morbid fear, the reappearance of his own hateful weaknesses in his boy. Hitherto, Roll had given no signs of slyness or untruthfulness. His faults seemed to lie in other directions, and in his strong will Oliver had, so far, taken a secret pride. But if the boy were sly as well as obstinate, what sort of a prospect was there for the future? He shook his head as he drew the boy into the room and shut the door.

He asked Miss Paking to repeat her complaint, and when she had finished, he asked the culprit what he had to say.

Roll stood, cheeks flushed, eyes held down, a dour, determined little figure.

“Look at me, Roll, and answer.”

The boy looked up at once, but not with his usual wide-open gaze. From half-closed lids he shot upwards a quick glance in which surprise showed clearly, but no fear. Just so, Oliver remembered, had old Martin sometimes looked at him.

“Her way’s no better than our way. I don’t see why I should do it.”

Oliver noted the “our,” and he could not repress a smile. Then he saw the boy’s face light up. That would not do at all. He felt that this was a crisis, and that, for the boy’s sake, he must stand firm.

“You’ve behaved very badly,” he said, trying, with poor success, to make his voice sound cold,



and hard, and inflexible. "I'm going to punish you"—he saw the surprise deepen to astonishment—"but I should like to hear you tell Miss Paking that you are sorry, and that you will do those sums properly."

So far, he had never punished the boy at all except by putting him to bed, and then the punishment had generally ended in a romp.

"I'll do them for *you*," said Roll.

"As long as he does them—" began Miss Paking. She was very fond of the boy, and she was beginning to wish she had kept the matter to herself.

But Oliver had been tuning himself to the tragic point. Weak as he was, he could not give in to a child of eight. He remembered with horrible distinctness that in the middle drawer of his writing-table lay a pretty little dog-whip. He turned to Miss Paking.

"Roll and I must fight this out," he said. She nodded, and left them to their duel.

Oliver opened the drawer and took out the whip.

"Roll," he said, and he heard his own voice shaking, "I've never whipped you before, and I hoped it would never come to this."

The boy looked up, and there was no sign of fear or of yielding. But as he watched his father's face intently, the fashion of his own began to change.

"How shall I stand, Father?" he said, and all the sullenness had gone out of his voice.

With a heavy heart, Oliver pointed to the table

and told him to bend over it. Roll was in flannels and the whip stung furiously. The fourth stroke brought a sob, and Oliver threw the whip across the room and sat down in his chair. The boy drew his sleeve across his eyes and made as if to leave the room. Then he stopped and came slowly back to his father's chair.

"Father," he said in a low, awestruck voice, "why—you're crying!"

As he spoke, he laid his hand on Oliver's. Something in the tone, the touch, the expression of the boy's face seemed suddenly to kindle a flame in Oliver's heart. He snatched the boy up on his knee, put his arm round him, and drew him close.

"Roll," he said, "I'll never strike you again, whatever you do. I've no right to."

"Yes you have," answered the boy. "Fathers can always give their boys a licking."

"Tell me one thing, Roll; the truth, you know. When I opened the door just now, were you trying to listen to what Miss Paking and I were saying?"

The boy answered without a shade of hesitation.

"No, Father. I'd only just come to the door when you opened it. I was just going to knock."

"That's right, my boy; I'm so glad. Now I'll tell you why I had no right to strike you, and why I'll never do it again."

Then he began telling Roll the tale of his own

boyhood—of his cowardice, and slyness, and untruthfulness. “You’re ten times as brave and true and straight as I was,” he said. “And I’ve never really conquered my faults. I have to be on the watch every day, and they are disgraceful faults to have to fight, when you’re grown up. That’s why I was so frightened when I thought you might be sneaking at the door. I beg your pardon, Roll; I ought to have known better. But, my boy, you have faults too—not nearly so bad, nothing like so disgraceful. That strong will of yours is a splendid thing, but you must put a bit in its mouth while you’re a boy. You must drive it, or it will drive you, don’t forget that.”

It was a long, strange talk for a father and a small boy, and when Oliver kissed him and set him down, the expression on the boy’s face completely baffled him. But an hour afterwards, when he was still sitting in the chair thinking of what he might have said, and half fearing that he had made two fatal mistakes in the whipping and the talk, he heard a familiar knock at the door. It was Roll, his face bright and happy, but—or so Oliver fancied—with something new in its expression.

“Father,” he exclaimed, talking very fast in his eagerness, “I’ve written out those sums *her* way, and I ’pologised, and she was awfully nice, and *I will* drive it.”



## VII

Every year Oliver, Roll, and Mrs. Bannock spent a month or six weeks by the sea. For some time Oliver had kept to his father's favourite place—Lowestoft. But of late the Channel Islands had supplanted the East Coast, and one year it was Jersey; the other, Guernsey. In spite of the fact that she was rapidly nearing eighty, Mrs. Bannock was a capital sailor and still full of interest in life. A highly efficient middle-aged parlourmaid named Chumley had been promoted to being a sort of hybrid Officer of the Household—half housekeeper, half maid—thus setting the old lady free to read the newspaper, the Bible, and an occasional novel; to play patience by herself, and piquet with Oliver; and to knit socks for Roll's ever-growing feet.

On these excursions they were invariably joined by Bertie and Rotha Squires, with their little tribe of three, Winnie now having to share the nursery with a Vivien as fair as she herself, and a sturdy, black-haired little Claude.

The year Roll was ten, it was Jersey's turn, and the two families were settled in comfortable quarters at St. Heliers, next door to each other. Bertie on a holiday was absolutely priceless. It was he who planned every day's programme and was largely responsible for its successful issue. His spirits never failed. He was indefatigable at old games, and wonderfully ingenious in contriving new ones. Before leaving London he

always invested a pound or two in tricks and puzzles, which he kept in reserve for wet days, and a new one was produced whenever one of the children cried. If the tears were justified, he said, the weeper needed consolation ; if temper was the cause, the others ought to be compensated. Two of his pockets were always accessible to any of the party ; one bulged with tobacco, the other with sweets.

Oliver too had his accomplishments, and he derived not a little innocent gratification from the admiration shown by the children for his drawing and playing. When it came to story-telling, Bertie's more robust yarns were perhaps the favourites, but Winnie cuddled up to Oliver, and whispered that his were lovely. In swimming, Oliver was the hero, for he was still really fast in the water, and Bertie was too lazy for long distances, over which he might have lasted the better.

In the mornings they used to bathe and then play cricket or dig on the sands of St. Aubin, while the afternoons were generally reserved for expeditions.

"Grandfather and grandmother have come over," said Winnie one morning, running in from next door. "They came by last night's boat. They are staying at Bree's Hotel, and they've got a boy with them about Roll's size."

Oliver made a little grimace which Winnie, by good luck, did not see. He had not seen Mr. or Mrs. Lanyard since his schooldays, except at Bertie's wedding, when there was no opportunity

for more than a few hasty words. Of Mrs. Lanyard he had pleasant memories and he felt glad to meet her again, but Lucifer was another matter. Still, there was no help for it.

He found them both a good deal altered. Mrs. Lanyard seemed old and frail, but her face brightened and looked younger when she saw Oliver.

“And is this really your boy?” she asked, looking at Roll, who shook hands with his usual happy friendliness. “Is he as fond of music as you used to be?”

Oliver shook his head.

“He hardly knows one note from another,” he answered. “It’s about the only thing at which he isn’t better than his father.”

Mrs. Lanyard looked at the boy, hoping for a repudiation, but Roll only laughed, and said,

“You get me a big drum and see.”

“Or a big trumpet,” suggested Bertie.

“Yes,” answered Roll instantly, “it’d be father’s, and wouldn’t I blow it?”

Mr. Lanyard was accompanied by a tall, well-built boy evidently a year or two older than Roll.

“You remember Carter,” the schoolmaster said to Oliver. “He played for Cambridge and Surrey; he ought to have played for England. This is his boy and he’s going to follow in his father’s steps, only I think he’ll be more of a bowler and less of a bat. He’s got a fine control over the ball already.”

Oliver shook hands with the boy.

“You’re wonderfully like what your father



was," he said. "I should have known you anywhere, I think."

Mr. Lanyard had lost that appearance of energy in leash that Oliver remembered so well, and his manner was much milder. Yet every now and again a short, sharp sentence would come from the thin lips like the crack of a whip, and Oliver, in spite of his middle age, felt a thrill of the old fear.

The day after the Lanyards' arrival, the whole party went down to the sands and bathed. Then Mr. Lanyard declared that a game of cricket would do them all good. Bertie explained, with daring mendacity, that they always spent the half hour after a bath in quiet meditation.

"You had nine hours of that last night," said Mr. Lanyard relentlessly. "You and I will pick sides. No, we needn't toss. I'll take Raymond."

"Roll," said Bertie.

"Rotha."

"Oliver."

"Winnie."

"Vivien and her bat."

"Right," said Mr. Lanyard, who had never seen the weapon. "Now let's toss for innings."

"No," answered Bertie. "You had first pick, we open the ball. Vivien, my beauty, you take first knock and hit 'em all over the shop."

Vivien rushed to the wicket, trailing after her something that looked like the top of a small

table. It was a bat, made for her by her ingenious father, very thin and light, but about double the regulation width.

“Hullo! What’s that?” demanded her grandfather.

“That’s her Biblical bat,” replied Bertie, who was umpiring.

“Why Biblical?”

“Because it’s like the commandments; it’s exceeding broad. Now then, play up!”

Winnie began the bowling, but not being able to see the wicket for the bat, pitched first one side and then the other, and with one or two lucky knocks Vivien managed to score six runs. Then Mr. Lanyard took the ball and soon got the batswoman caught by her mother. Oliver, ridiculously nervous, was clean bowled second ball. Then Bertie went in and, violating every canon of good batsmanship, soon hit Mr. Lanyard off. When he was bowled by Raymond Carter the score was 17.

“Now, Roll, you play as I’ve taught you, not as I’ve shown you,” said Bertie.

It was a quarter to twelve when he went in, and half-past when he accepted his father’s suggestion and retired with the score at 62. The other side started, and Mr. Lanyard soon hit up 30. Then, to Roll’s uproarious delight, he was caught by Bertie off a mis-hit from one of Oliver’s long-hops. Raymond made 9, and the match had to be left drawn.

“An exceedingly good innings, young man,” said Mr. Lanyard to Roll as they were walking

home. You haven't learnt to use your wrists yet, but your bat was as straight as a die, and you played Raymond's curly ones wonderfully well. Who, do you say, taught you ? ”

“ Father,” answered Roll without a moment's hesitation.

“ There's gratitude ! ” exclaimed Bertie.

“ Inorganic chemistry ! ” cried Bertie, in great astonishment, looking over Oliver's shoulder one evening. “ I shouldn't have thought that was much in your line.”

“ It isn't, but, you see, the young un's going to Bloomsbury in September, and they're rather strong on science there—that's why I'm sending him. I believe science will be his long suit. And I like to know something about the road he's going to travel. I might be able to help him a bit at first.”

“ Good man ! ” said Bertie approvingly. “ You may thank your stars you haven't got a couple of girls tied to your coat-tails. I'm not going to be beaten by you as a father, so I suppose I shall have to learn knitting, and crochet, and plain sewing.”

## VIII

With Roll's start at the Bloomsbury school, a new, keen pleasure entered into Oliver's life. He had felt grave doubts as to the wisdom of letting the boy remain so long in Miss Paking's hands, but the first term's report showed that he



had made no mistake. Roll was one of the youngest boys in his class, but evidently one of the most advanced. The books he had used, the methods he had been taught, were all of the latest and the best ; there was nothing to unlearn.

The larger life of the new school came as a welcome and wholesome stimulus to him. He had been too long and too easily cock of the walk at Pinner, and both Miss Paking and Oliver wondered how he would feel the change. As a matter of fact, he revelled in it. By the end of the first week he had a chum, two or three friends, and quite a cloud of decent chaps whose names seemed to drop from his lips almost every time he opened them.

Though he missed the boy terribly at lunch, Oliver found compensation in the evening preparation time, when Roll would bring his books as a matter of course to his father's study, and they would talk over the day's doings and discuss the next day's work. Oliver had kept up his Latin and Greek, and in French and English he could give efficient help, but in mathematics and science he soon found that the boy was going too fast for him. At first he tried to conduct a strategic withdrawal, alleging, in face of a too knotty problem, that he was busy, or that Roll must learn to grapple with difficulties by himself. These considerations, however, would apply as well to the other subjects, so he fell back on another line of defence, and procured Keys to the mathematical books. The result went beyond his expectations. The very first evening

after the arrival of the invaluable little pamphlets, a perfect beast of an equation presented itself.

“ Oh, Father ! ” cried Roll after a hard try, “ this can’t be right. Do see what you make of it.”

Oliver noted that it was a cry of despair ; there was evidently no confidence in his ability to grapple with the problem. The lack of confidence was, he knew, amply justified, for he had tried and had ignominiously failed. But the Key had opened the door and he could guess where the boy had gone wrong.

“ Come here,” he said, “ and let’s see what you’ve done.”

As he expected, the same hurdle had brought them both down.

“ There,” he said, pointing to one line. “ That’s where you’ve gone astray. You should have taken this over to the other side, like this.”

A minute later the boy clapped his hands.

“ I see, of course. Oh, Father, how clever of you ! Let me finish it now.”

At supper he told the tale to Mrs. Bannock.

“ Mr. Gilbert told us we should find number seven a bit of a teaser,” he said. “ And father always says he’s no good at maths., but he spotted in an instant where I’d gone wrong, and did it like butter. I only wish I were no good in the same way.”

Mrs. Bannock beamed upon her two idols.

“ Ah, my dear,” she said to Roll, “ I hope you’ll grow up modest as well as clever, like your father.”

But after Roll had gone to bed and Mrs. Bannock had followed, Oliver, quietly reviewing the day and its happenings, found a sting in those compliments to his mathematical ability. This Key business, what was it but another specimen of his old, hateful duplicity, never so hateful, surely, as when the person to be tricked was his own boy. With him, at any rate, he had vowed he would be utterly open and frank and true. Well, he had taken one false step, but there should be no more in that direction. He took out the Keys, tore them into bits, and threw them into his waste-paper basket. There! The boy would wonder when he found how little help his father could give, but he would probably think that this had been just a lucky hit.

On his way to bed he almost always looked in at Roll's door, which was left ajar. As a rule the boy was fast asleep, but to-night, as he put his head in, a voice called out, "Is that you, Father?"

"Yes," he answered. "Why aren't you asleep?"

"Something dropped overhead, I think, and half woke me up. Then I heard the stairs creak, and guessed it was you, and that finished it. It's a bit of luck, isn't it?"

"Bad luck, you mean."

"No, real good luck. We can have a little gas."

"Shall I light it?"

"Oh, Dad, you know what I mean—gab then, if that's more classical."



Oliver felt his way to the bed and sat down on the edge, just—he remembered—as his father had once sat on the edge of his bed, before he went to his boarding-school. Immediately, by some mental process too rapid for his own analysis, he decided that the tearing up of the Keys was not sufficient. He must make a clean breast of it to his boy.

“Roll,” he said, “do you remember my telling you, some time ago, that when I was a boy I was tricky and cowardly and sly, and that I had still to fight against the same kind of thing?”

“Yes, Father, I remember,” answered the boy softly.

Oliver paused. His task was harder than he had expected. Then a small hand came out from under the bedclothes. Oliver took it in his and went on steadily :

“You know that sum this evening ; I couldn’t have done it any more than you could. But I had got a Key so that I could help you—I suppose I wanted you to think me cleverer than I am. That’s how I was able to do it. But I’ve torn the dirty thing up, and we’ll work honestly, and you’ll see what a stupid old father you’ve got.”

“I love you awf’lly, Dad,” came almost in a whisper, from the pillow. “What’s the time?”

“Time you were fast asleep,” said Oliver, and kissed him, and walked out of the room on tiptoe.

## IX

Although the Keys were destroyed, Oliver would not give up the pleasure of helping Roll with his mathematics.

“ Sooner than do that, I’ll go to school myself,” he said to Bertie.

“ When the mountain wouldn’t go to Mahomet,” Bertie quoted. “ Why not make the school come to you ? I know a young fellow who was sixth Wrangler a year or two ago. He’s reading for the bar now, but he’s pretty hard up, and he’d be awfully glad of a little coaching, especially,” he added, with a graceful nod, “ with such a pupil as you.”

“ Is he any good with duffers ? ”

“ He ought to be ; he used to coach pass men at Cambridge.”

The Wrangler turned out to be a man named Letheridge, a thin, flaxen-haired, spectacled individual with a diffident manner till mathematics or law rose on the horizon, when he immediately became authoritative, if not dictatorial. Terms were quickly arranged, for Oliver insisted on a super-fee.

“ I know I’m about as thick as they make them, at this stuff,” he said, “ and it’ll be awful drudgery for you.”

Letheridge, however, was agreeably surprised, for Oliver, though not brilliant, was certainly above the average, and enjoyed taking up again his old school work, while the thought of being

able to help Roll was a constant and powerful spur. The plan worked admirably. Always keeping a little ahead, and thoroughly mastering the work as he went on, he did smooth the boy's way most effectively. His reward, and he thought it more than adequate, was to watch closely, and with an understanding eye, every step of Roll's rapid progress.

The relation between the father and son was thus an unusual one, and perhaps its most remarkable feature was the boy's attitude. He never presumed in the slightest degree on the community of interests and the comradeship which Oliver encouraged. He treated his father not merely with respect and affection, but with more than a touch of hero-worship, which was very sweet to Oliver, though he took it as an indication of the boy's desire to please him, rather than for the deep, genuine feeling that it really was.

One Saturday evening just before bedtime, Roll, who, as usual, was keeping his father company in the study, got up from his chair and knelt down in front of the fire.

"Father," he said abruptly, "why's religion such a funny thing?"

Oliver looked up from his paper and down at his boy.

"'Funny,' eh? Well, that isn't exactly the adjective I should have used."

"Oh, but you *must* know what I mean. Why's it so—so different from other things? Why's Sunday the dullest day of the week? Even Granny puts on a face for Sunday."



“ Do I put on a face ? ” asked Oliver, smiling.

“ Oh, you’re different. That’s why I asked you. I always feel sorry on Saturday because Sunday’s coming, and I always feel glad on Monday because it’s over. Is that wicked ? ”

“ I don’t know, but I often used to feel like that when I was a boy.”

“ That’s good,” said Roll, and lapsed into silence, while Oliver took up his paper again, but not to read. He had always dreaded this discussion with his boy. Roll’s questions were generally so simple and direct, and his own resolve to be quite frank was so strong, that he foresaw the most acute difficulties. Hitherto Mrs. Bannock had attended to the boy’s religious education, and she had arranged for him to attend a “ superior ” Bible-class on Sunday afternoons. Of this class he had long been a shining light, and had won the first prize every year since he joined it. But once or twice lately, Oliver had noticed in the boy a slight unwillingness to go, and a little impatience on being questioned about the proceedings, so this outburst had not taken him altogether by surprise.

“ Do you think it’s all true, Father ? ”

“ What’s the ‘ all ’ ? ” he asked.

“ About loving God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. Miss Richards was going on last Sunday about loving Jesus. She said we ought to love Him ten times—a hundred times I think she got to—more than father or mother. Fancy my loving *anybody* a hundred times more than you ! Isn’t it—well, isn’t it

absurd? It made me blush to hear her. I didn't know where to look."

Oliver smiled.

"And it takes something to make you blush," he said, thinking how easy he used to find the performance.

But the boy was too eager to be balked by a smile.

"And then faith," he went on. "How can you *make* yourself believe? Miss Richards says you'll be punished if you don't. Why should you be? Father"—he suddenly dropped his voice—"suppose there's no God at all?"

To Oliver there was something strange and moving, but not tragic, in hearing these old, eternal riddles of the Sphinx coming forth again, like the giants of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to challenge each new wayfarer. But what should he say?

"Roll, my boy," he said, "this is worse than the algebra, for there's no Key on the market. I suppose I might get a coach, but it would have to be a bishop at least, and I don't know what fee he'd want."

He spoke lightly, but all the time he was thinking hard what he should really say.

"Don't chaff me, Father," said the boy. "There isn't another person in the world I'd ask, except you."

"I wasn't chaffing, I was trying to get time to think. It's very hard to put into words what I want to say, and a man's way of looking at things is so different from a boy's that, no

matter how close they are"—he laid his hand on the boy's head—"it's difficult for them to understand each other."

"Yes," said Roll gravely.

"There's another difficulty," Oliver went on. "You know how Granny looks at things. Well, she is far, far better than I shall ever be, but I can't make myself think just as she does, though I've come much nearer to it than I was a few years ago. But I'll tell you what I really do believe, Roll. If you want to learn religion you must look to life to teach you. Life is a better teacher than all the bishops put together. If there is a God, He has shaped this life of ours, and it is in life that you must seek Him. But you must live first, and so I think that to most of us true religion only comes gradually, as we live out our lives. But while you are almost at the start of life I should listen to what good people say about religion, and listen humbly and trustfully, Roll, for a lot of it is *their* experience. And as you grow up, you will test everything that has been told you, by your own experience, and so, I think, you will be learning from God Himself. Many years ago, there was someone I knew who had a great deal of unhappiness, some of it her own fault, I suppose, and when she was dying she gave me two words of advice that I've never forgotten. *Trust life*, she said. Many people would have said, *Trust God*, but she put it the other way. I'm coming to think that it means very much the same thing, but it lies in my heart as she gave it me—*Trust life*."



“Father,” said Roll, after the silence had lasted for a minute or two, “won’t you tell me, out of your own experience, what to believe? I’d take it from you—how did you say? trustfully and humbly; I’d love to.”

“No, dear boy,” answered Oliver sadly, “you must ask those who are better than I. Wait a minute, though,” he added, after another pause; “fetch me that big Bible on the bottom shelf, there.”

The boy brought it, and Oliver turned the pages to find the last chapter of Job. He pointed to the fifth verse.

“There, Roll,” he said, “I think I’ve got as far as that.”

And the boy read aloud:

*“I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye seeth thee.”*

## X

These were happy days for Oliver. The misery that had followed his marriage and the deadly torpor of the months after Ethel’s death were painful memories that still haunted his dreams. But ever since his heart had begun to warm towards his child, a light had dawned upon his life and waxed steadily, till now it glowed like the high-mounting sun. For a time, indeed, the idle hours often hung heavy on his hands. Occasional gleams of success with stories and drawings encouraged him, and Bertie’s companionship

was an invaluable help. Then he developed quite a passion for gardening, put up greenhouses, and began to try for prizes at the local shows. His generosity soon won him endless invitations to take part in charitable work, and before long he was able to write "J.P." after his name. From London he kept away as much as possible. The coarsest of his temptations he had resisted manfully, yet there were times when his thoughts were traitors, and the yearning after the old, bad days and the evil associates grew almost irresistible. He had long since given up his membership of the Arts and Letters, yet he still wondered what would happen if he were to meet Mount again.

But as Roll grew from infancy to childhood, and thence to boyhood, Oliver became conscious of a change in his own attitude towards those temptations with which Mount was always associated in his mind. They still seemed to him, at times, attractive, but he now felt them, attractive or not, to be simply impossible. Between him and the tree with its luscious and bewitching fruit there stood, not an angel with a flaming sword, but still an impassable barrier, and the barrier was a small boy in knickerbockers. As he looked at him he felt that such sins were not merely impossible; they had become absolutely unthinkable. The feeling grew stronger and deeper every year, as he watched the boy draw near to that critical age when he must begin to understand what such temptations mean. "If I am to be any use to him then," he

told himself, "it will only be if I have managed to keep my heel on them myself."

And now, each new year brought with it fresh interests and excitements. That Roll was an unusually brilliant boy was clear from his reports, his prizes, and from a special letter which the Headmaster had been moved to write, a letter in which he spoke of the boy's "really remarkable progress and great promise." He was a big boy, and at thirteen was already a star in the junior games. For his benefit Oliver managed to secure a small piece of land at the back of the garden. Levelled, returfed and netted in, this made a fine practice pitch, and here, in the spring, a professional from Lord's came once a week to coach the lad. His school friends were always welcome, and a special room was dedicated to their reception. The house that had been so prim and quiet, now rang with the clear, glad voices of girls and boys, for Winnie and Vivien were constant visitors, and often Claude too. And among them Oliver moved, as happy as they, enjoying, it seemed to him, the first real childhood he had ever known.

## XI

It was when Roll had just turned fourteen that the great Homeric quarrel arose between him and Winnie. He had, if the truth must be told, developed rather acute symptoms of the hobbledehoy stage. His voice had become



strangely uncertain both in quantity and quality, his arms and legs seemed to have grown out of proportion to his body, and his usually sweet and merry disposition was shot with strange erratic moods that came and passed like the clouds of an April day. Even Oliver sometimes found him trying, though with his father the boy tried his hardest to curb the waywardness of which he was conscious and which he himself could not understand.

"Whatever's the matter with me, Dad?" he said one evening, after a penitent apology for a rough answer that had hurt and distressed his father. "I feel all over prickles, like a hedgehog, and I simply hate the sound of my own voice."

Oliver smiled.

"Do you remember at St. Heliers," he answered, "how you used to dislike the time when we were waiting on the steamer before it started? It was all right on the pier, and it was all right on the open sea. It was the ten minutes of neither-one-thing-nor-the-other that was a nuisance."

"I see," said the boy quickly. "I was endurable as a kid, and perhaps I'll be endurable again when I'm a man; just now I'm loathsome to myself and to everyone else too."

"With one exception, at any rate," answered Oliver, drawing the boy to him.

It was at this period that Oliver, remembering his own researches into the *Pantalogia* and the medical books, took good care that the natural and eager curiosity of youth should be satisfied in a simpler and more direct fashion. And once

more the boy in his own way, artless yet subtle, let his father see how grateful he was for the frankness and confidence.

Winnie, meanwhile, was passing through the same stage in the quietest and most graceful way imaginable. She had developed into a tall, slim girl with her mother's fair hair and, in her face, a good deal more than the promise of beauty. A certain quaint originality of thought and speech sometimes recalled her father, and, like him, she was strenuously straightforward. She was a very decided young person with a large assortment of well-defined opinions, to which she held on with great tenacity. In the ordinary school subjects she did not greatly excel, but music was her passion, and on the fiddle she had been something of an infant prodigy.

At Bannockburn, Winnie was a great favourite. She and Roll were almost like brother and sister. Mrs. Bannock loved her dearly, and she was devoted to the old lady. Oliver, strange to say, was just a little afraid of her. His sensitive self-consciousness told him that she looked upon him with a critical eye, and the feeling raised a slight, impalpable barrier between them.

Bertie's abode exactly faced a turning that led straight to the station, and in spite of argument and ridicule he had insisted on naming it "The House Opposite." To him, to his family, and to almost all his visitors, he pointed out, it *was* the house opposite, and it was, therefore, only common sense to call it such.

To The House Opposite, then, one Saturday afternoon, at the beginning of the summer holidays, Roll cycled over in flannels and armed with his tennis bat. He was not in a very happy mood, for he knew that he ought to have stayed at home. Mr. Leete, the new curate, was coming to tea, and Mrs. Bannock had a great idea of what was due to the cloth—even curate-cloth. But Roll did not suffer curates gladly, unless indeed they had been public school or 'varsity sportsmen of distinction. Now, Mr. Leete could not play either football or cricket for toffee, and his sermons were most reprehensibly long. So Roll had slipped off, taking advantage of the fact that Mrs. Bannock had not expressly asked him to be in at tea-time. He felt he was behaving shabbily to the old lady, of whom he was very fond, and he knew that his father would disapprove. If it had been anyone except Mr. Leete, he told himself, he would have sacrificed his tennis on the altar of politeness.

Bertie at this time was away on a flying visit to America, and Rotha and the younger children happened to be out, so Winnie and Roll had the garden to themselves. They were a well-matched pair at tennis, for though the boy had the more powerful strokes, Winnie was wonderfully active and was a very clever little strategist. This afternoon, indeed, her strategy seemed to Roll a little *too* clever, and when, time after time, she beat him with cunning soft drops and "pats," he began to feel irritated, and, to shame her, played his hardest, manliest game. Carrying



this demonstration of superiority a trifle too far, he lost game, set, and rubber, with a wild smash into the net.

“That looked like temper,” said Winnie, who did not suspect that this was really the case.

Roll made an effort to smile.

“It was too tempting,” he said. “That’s the strength of your game.”

“What is ? ”

“To make the other chap lose his temper.”

“And *did* the other chap lose it ? ”

“He would have done, if we’d had another set.”

“He’d better have some fruit, then,” said Winnie, pointing to the summer-house.

Under the sweet influences of late cherries and early plums Roll became more like his usual sunny self, but the cloud was still hovering near.

“Where’s your father ? ” he asked.

“In New York, worse luck,” she answered.

“I call it thundering good luck. Fancy being able to gad about half over the world ! That’s the sort of holiday I should like.”

“But this isn’t a holiday. Dad’s had to go over on business.”

“Oh, that’s what they always say,” he remarked, with a wicked prescience that the remark would annoy Winnie.

Her voice showed that he was right.

“Who do ? ” she demanded tartly.

“Fathers, of course,” he replied.

As it happened, they were both father-

worshippers. In a moment, the light of battle shone in Winnie's eyes.

"You can speak for your own father," she said, "but mine doesn't tell lies."

Made quite innocently, this was a most unfortunate remark. His father's confessions had appealed profoundly to Roll's chivalrous instincts. In making them, he had, the boy felt, done a hard, a courageous, and a noble thing, and the only possible answer on his part was to trust his father utterly. Winnie's reckless speech seemed to him a wanton outrage on something holy and sacred. It flashed into his mind that her father must have been blabbing.

He stood up, his face crimson. He was so angry that for the moment he could not speak. Winnie had gone white. Roll's face, and attitude, and silence frightened her, and she was already heartily ashamed of her words.

"I'm sorry, Roll," she said, "I didn't mean——"

But Roll had found his tongue.

"You're a wicked liar," he said, "and your father's been sneaking, I can see. I'll never speak another word to you."

Then Winnie too blazed. The blood rushed to her cheeks.

"I begged your pardon," she said, "and I'll never speak to you again till you beg mine."

Roll turned on his heel and walked away.

## XII

It was only gradually that the two households came to know of the quarrel. Neither Roll nor Winnie said a word at home. Winnie pleaded a headache, and Roll's moody silence was put to the credit of the awkward age. And then the very next day, Mrs. Bannock was taken ill with an unseasonable attack of influenza. The dear old lady had at last begun to give plain signs of weakening powers, and though this attack was not, in itself, a violent one, yet the doctor shook his head, and sent in first one nurse and then a second.

"I wonder that neither Winnie nor her mother has been," said Oliver on the Tuesday evening. "Just run over, will you, Roll, and tell them of Aunt Alice's illness. She asked after Win this afternoon. Don't you want to go, dear boy? I'll go myself. I dare say it'll do me good."

Roll did not want to go, but the trouble on his father's face had touched him keenly.

"No, Father," he answered. "I'll go like a shot. What shall I say about Granny? Is she any better?"

"Not yet, I'm afraid, but the doctor says if she can get a good night's sleep, it may make all the difference."

So Roll rode off. He too was troubled about Granny, as well as for his father's trouble.

In the front garden of The House Opposite, Winnie was picking flowers, with Claude at her



heels. Roll propped his bicycle against the gate and walked past her without a word or sign. Claude seized his arm and pulled him towards the door.

As it happened, Rotha had been looking out of the drawing-room window and had lifted her eyebrows in surprise. But Roll's news put this little incident, for the moment, out of her head. She asked a multitude of questions, and promised to come round, the first thing next morning.

After Roll had gone, Winnie came into the drawing-room, and her mother noticed that she neither said nor asked anything about Roll's call. The news of Mrs. Bannock's illness came as a great shock and the girl's eyes filled with tears, yet, to Rotha's surprise, she did not suggest going with her in the morning.

"What's the matter with you and Roll?" her mother asked. "Have you had a quarrel?"

There was never any beating about the bush with Winnie.

"Yes, Mother," she answered.

"You silly children!" exclaimed Rotha. "I thought you were both of you much too sensible for that kind of thing. What is it all about?"

Winnie looked down.

"We were arguing, and we both got angry, and he was abominably rude."

Rotha was admirably sensible, but not very quick in her sympathies.

"I'm astonished at you—at your age, both of you. You ought to be put in the corner in the

nursery—you in the one corner and he in the other.”

To this remark Winnie made no reply, and Rotha, glancing at the girl's firm, set face, tried another tack.

“Come over with me to-morrow and make it up. Why, you're like brother and sister.”

“No!” exclaimed Winnie with such energy that her mother started. “There's no making up. We've burnt our boats.”

“How did you do that, and what do you mean? Come, Winnie, tell me in plain English.”

“He said he'd never speak to me again, and I said I wouldn't speak to him till he had begged my pardon.”

“I see. You both lost your tempers and you're both too proud to own it. Well, I'm disappointed in you, and I don't know what poor Granny will say.”

“Do you think she knows?” asked the girl quickly.

“I don't know, but I'm sure she has asked, or will ask, about you and why you haven't come.”

Next morning, when Rotha was starting for Pinner, Winnie came into the hall with her hat on and a huge bunch of roses in her hand.

“It's that ‘Viscountess Folkestone’ Granny is so fond of,” she said. “May I come with you?”

On the way, Rotha tried again to find out what the quarrel was about, but still in vain.

“I can't tell you, unless Roll would tell too, and I'm sure he won't,” was all she would say.

Mrs. Bannock had slept fairly well and was a

little better. She insisted on seeing Rotha, and at once asked for Winnie. The nurse would only allow one visitor at a time, so it was not till her mother came down that Winnie went up. The old lady was delighted to see her, and almost cried with pleasure at the roses.

“My dear child,” she said, “I’ve been wondering where you were. I felt sure Roll would have told you—I know you’re always together in your holidays.”

“We only heard of it yesterday,” Winnie answered. “Roll hasn’t been over since Saturday.”

“Naughty boy—” the old lady began with a smile, and then stopped, looked confused, and put her hand to her head. The nurse came forward and made a little gesture which Winnie understood at once.

“Good-bye for the present, Granny darling,” she said. “I’ll come over again to-morrow.”

That evening Oliver, who had seen Rotha while Winnie was upstairs, had a word with Roll.

“What’s wrong with Winnie?” he asked.

“Who told you?”

“You know who came this afternoon.”

“Well—we’ve quarrelled.” The tone was tragic.

“Make it up, Roll. The boy should take the lead.”

He shook his head.

“No, Father. We’ve said things.”

“Could you quote?”

“No, I’m afraid not.”



“ Tell me, Roll. Were you to blame ? ”

He thought for a moment. “ Yes. I was in a bad temper, but she was worse, she was really, Father.”

“ And you can’t tell me any more ? ”

“ No, I truly can’t.”

“ Very well, I won’t press you. But Roll, my boy, I would dearly like you to be generous and make it up at almost any cost.”

“ There are some things you can’t forget.”

“ No, but you can forgive.”

“ *You* could, Father, I know. But it comes hard to me to forgive some things.”

An idea struck Oliver.

“ One question more, only one. Had it anything to do with me ? Can you tell me that ? ”

The boy looked up, and the expression of his face touched Oliver deeply. Before a word came, he spoke again, himself.

“ No, you can’t. Very well, we’ll leave it there, but you won’t forget what I said, will you ? ”

“ No, I won’t. I’ll think it out hard.”

For three days not another word passed between the two as to the quarrel. Then on the Friday afternoon, Mrs. Bannock had a sudden threatening of heart failure, and Roll was sent off post-haste for the doctor. He had just a glimpse of the patient as she lay with her face in profile on the pillow, and almost as white as the bed-linen. Until that moment he had not realized that Death had entered the house, and

now stood waiting at the very door of the room, if he had not actually opened it. In spite of his strong will the boy was very soft-hearted, and at the thought of all Granny's unfailing goodness, and of her valiant faith in him, the tears streamed unheeded down his cheeks. In the presence of this real, big trouble, all his moodiness and ill-temper passed like mist from that inner eye with which even a boy begins to scan his own heart, and left it clear to pass judgment on himself.

The doctor soon came and administered his restoratives, while Roll, his father's arm on his shoulder, and the nurse, stood by the bed waiting for the issue. It came at last. Very slowly, so gradually as, at first, to be almost imperceptible, the blood began to tinge again the pallor of the white cheek, the lips parted, and the breathing became apparent. Then, after another interval, the eyes opened, and what sounded like a low sigh of relief was heard. The doctor turned round to Oliver.

"That's all right," he said in a low voice. "She'll pull round now. But it was a near thing."

As Oliver came back into the hall from seeing the doctor out, he met Roll with his cap on.

"Aren't you going to have some tea?" he asked. "Where are you going in such a hurry?"

"I can't wait for tea," the boy answered eagerly. "I'm off to Harrow."

Oliver looked a question. Roll nodded.

"Bring her back with you," said his father.

It was just after six when he reached Harrow. The hall door of The House Opposite was wide open, and he saw right through to the gleam of a white frock on the lawn at the back. Dispensing with the formality of an announcement, he left his bicycle outside and ran through the hall. Then, to his discomfiture, he saw that Winnie was not alone. Her mother, close by, was spraying some rose trees.

Winnie was the first to see him, and she turned away, her cheeks flushing hotly.

Rotha noticed an unusual expression on the boy's face, one that she could not interpret.

"No bad news, I hope, Roll?" she asked anxiously. "I thought dear Granny looked better this morning."

"She's been awfully bad," he answered. "It gave us a dreadful fright, but she's better now."

"I'll go over at once and have a word with Nurse," said Rotha. "It was good of you to come over."

"I came over for something else too," he said. "Winnie, I beg your pardon. I know I behaved like a beast, and I'm ashamed of myself."

Winnie turned and looked at him with glistening eyes, but seemed unable to say a word. Rotha looked very kindly at the boy.

"That's fine, Roll," she said softly. "I'm sorry I was in the way, to make it harder."

And she went into the house. Winnie came closer.

"Oh, Roll!" she exclaimed, "I wish I'd broken the ice. I was worse than you, and I beg your



pardon over and over again. But I really, honestly, truly, didn't mean what I said, as you took it. I wanted to tell you at the time."

"I know," he said, "but I wouldn't let you. And, Winnie, I didn't really mean what I said about your father—at least I suppose I *did* mean it then, but I know now that it was silly rot, only I was blind angry and I caught at anything to hurt you. Oh, the truth does sound vile! I think no end of him, and I jolly well ought to. He's been as kind to me——"

"Not kinder than your father has been to me," she interrupted. "It *was* horrid of us to drag them in. Roll, let's say that we'll never quarrel with each other again."

"I'll never quarrel again with you as long as I live," he said very quietly.

"Nor I with you," she added.

### XIII

Though Mrs. Bannock surprised the doctor by the way in which she pulled round, yet the respite was not very long. She spent two more Christmas days with the man and the boy whom she had loved so dearly and served so faithfully. On the last day of the old year she passed away, happy and contented to the very end, and mourned almost as much in The House Opposite as at Bannockburn itself.

Since his wife's death, Oliver had seen very little of her family, but from time to time he

had seen advertisements of new manuals in the Positive-Perfect series, which indicated that its author was still alive and active. On this occasion Oliver wrote to him, and the old gentleman appeared, with Lizzie as his escort. He was white-haired, and a long beard gave him quite a patriarchal appearance. His voice and manner of talk, however, were hardly changed, and they woke so many memories in Oliver's mind that he was hardly conscious of what was said, and there might have been trouble had not the watchful Bertie come to the rescue and started the patriarch on the welcome adventure of telling how the original idea of his Great Method first occurred to him.

Lizzie, who looked quite matronly, spoke very kindly to Roll, telling him about his Uncle Donald's successes at Rugby and Oxford, and speaking of his mother as a girl, her beauty and her cleverness. The boy was keenly interested, all the more because Oliver had said so little to him about her. Instinctively he felt that the subject was painful to his father, and therefore he had asked no questions. With Mrs. Bannock he was not so scrupulous, but her answers were so short and dry that he had soon ceased questioning her. Now, he rained questions on Lizzie. "Am I in the least bit like her?" was one of them, and his aunt, after looking hard at him, replied: "Not in face, and not in figure, and not in your way of carrying yourself—no, I can't see any likeness there. But there is something in your way of talking ;

yes, and you have an air of assurance that brings her back to me. You could never put her down, she was hardly ever at a loss, and I should think you are very much the same."

"Was she very, very good?" he asked, and for some reason dropped his voice almost to a whisper.

"Of course she was good," Lizzie answered rather sharply, and turned the conversation to his plans for the future.

"You had quite a long conversation with your aunt," said Oliver to his boy when everybody had gone and the two were alone in the study.

"Yes," he answered, "she was telling me a bit about mother."

Big boy though he was, Roll had kept, with his father, some of his childish habits and ways. He was now sitting on the hearthrug, fronting the fire, leaning back against his father's knees.

The death of Mrs. Bannock was affecting Oliver strangely. He felt a child again, timid and lonely. The house seemed horribly empty. He could not imagine what life would be like without her. In the light of their long companionship even Roll seemed an outsider—dear, brilliant, attractive, but still an outsider, to whom all the earlier life recalled by this bereavement was a sealed book. Then, suddenly, the thought struck him—Why was it a sealed book? Only because he had so willed it. He had shared a good many secrets with the boy, and never once had he



regretted having done so. Why had he kept silence so jealously about Ethel? Surely the boy had a right to know something of his mother.

“Roll,” he said, “do you know why I’ve hardly ever said anything to you about your mother?”

“No, Father,” he answered.

“The old reason, I suppose—cowardice. And yet, not that alone. There are several reasons, I think, and they get mixed up together. But I ought to have spoken—it’s your right to know.”

“But, Father,” the boy interrupted quickly, “I don’t want to hear what it gives you pain to tell. I’d ever so much rather not.”

“Good boy,” said Oliver; “but it would be worse pain now if I didn’t speak.”

Then he began his story, telling of Ethel’s first visit to Bannockburn, of her charm and cleverness and good-humour, of Mrs. Bannock’s devotion to her, of her coming to nurse him when he was ill, and of Mr. Henning’s visit to his flat.

“We both of us made the same mistake,” he said. “We thought we knew each other quite well, and we, neither of us, had the least idea what the other was really like; at any rate I had formed an utterly mistaken notion of your mother. I don’t mean that she had misled me, but in my ignorance and folly I had made a great mistake—one of those mistakes for which there is no help. With the right man she would have been perfectly happy, and she would have made him happy too. She was as strong as I am weak, and she had a wonderful charm. I don’t think

she herself knew what fear meant, and she must have seen that I was a coward, but she never showed that she saw it. If she had lived, I expect I should have been whatever she chose to make me."

He stopped. The tale was told, and he was already asking himself whether he had told it fairly. It seemed to him as if, in telling it, some of the bitterness he had felt, had gone. None, at any rate, he hoped, had found expression.

"Thank you, Father," said the boy when the length of the pause told him that the story was finished. "Am I—am I the least bit like her?"

"Not the very least!" exclaimed Oliver eagerly, "no more than you are like me, thank God. Uncle Bertie (so they called him at Bannockburn) says you hark back to my father, and I sometimes think he's right."

#### XIV

Without Mrs. Bannock, Oliver found Bannockburn unendurable, and after a good many talks with Roll and Bertie, he decided on going back to London. The ties that held him to Pinner were not very strong, and he felt that for his boy, as well as for himself, the larger, fuller life of a great city would come to stimulate and to brace.

Through Bertie, he found a very attractive little house in Grove End Road, St. John's Wood. It had been in the occupation of an artist whose

taste had left its mark in many of the arrangements and decorations. The garden, though not up to the Pinner standard, was unusually good for a London suburb. On the ground floor the third room was Oliver's study, and was furnished with two writing-tables, for it was really Roll's study as well as his father's. On the first floor, however, Roll had his own sitting-room.

"I want you to be perfectly free," his father said, "to invite your friends and have them in your own room, free from interruption."

There was a grand spare room, meant for Bertie and Rotha, and a smaller one which would, at a pinch, take Winnie and Vivien, or one of Roll's boy friends.

By this time Roll had quite established his position in the Bloomsbury school. There was no one to touch him in mathematics, and he had annexed most of the science prizes. His Latin and Greek were only mediocre, but the prizes for English verse and English essay had both fallen to his pen. He was President of the Debating Society, editor of the School Magazine, and secretary of the Scientific Society. He was in the school Rugger team, and was the second best bat in the eleven. It was said, and currently believed in the school, that already, if he had been old enough, he could have gained a Trinity mathematical scholarship. Oliver had long since been left behind, and Letheridge had taken over Roll to coach. He was, if possible, more eulogistic than the headmaster.

"If he isn't cock o' the year," he said, "when



he goes up to Cambridge, I shall be mightily surprised."

All this stir and bustle of success was very welcome to Oliver. New interests and excitements seemed to be springing up on every hand. At breakfast and dinner the conversation was almost always about school topics—whether Hudson was a decent captain or not, what chance the Sixth had of scholarships this year, which master was the biggest beast in the school, and so on. More and more, the father found himself drawn in and absorbed by the life of the son, till it sometimes seemed to him as if he really had hardly a separate life of his own. And yet, strangely enough, he felt as if now, for the first time, he were really coming to himself. His inner life had ceased to be a constant, humiliating struggle against temptations that fascinated, and repelled, and defiled. It was as though, after he had been fighting from dawn till night, victory had surprised him in his sleep. He no longer feared and trembled lest suddenly the Siren song should break upon his ear, for he knew that now there was a music in his heart which would always drown it. The purity and the transparent frankness of the relations between himself and Roll were to him so beautiful and so sacred that impurity and duplicity stood revealed not merely as ugly and base, but as monstrous—things against which Nature itself cried out.

And with this change there came another. He no longer loathed and despised himself, as he had done. In his heart something great and

wonderful had happened—of that, he had no doubt at all. But for his boy, it would never have happened—of that, too, he was quite sure. He thought of himself, not as the victor in a great battle, but rather as the field on which the victory had been won, and he felt himself ennobled by it.

There was yet another thought he often cherished with a secret joy. If his boy had done so much for him, had he not been able to do something for his boy? All his own impotent efforts and shameful failures would wear a very different aspect, shining as beacons to warn the boy from rock and shoal. Roll was naturally fine and noble, yet something he would owe to the home influences—to dear Granny in the first place, but something also even to his father.

## XV

“Father,” said Roll, taking the pipe from his lips, “I’ve got a great secret I want to tell you.”

Oliver looked up at his big, strapping son and a smile curved his lips, a smile in which humour, and pride, and tenderness were all represented.

“Ah such a secret!” he said.

“Oh, you think you know it,” answered Roll. “Bet you a new pipe you don’t.”

“Done!” said Oliver. “Has it anything to do with Winnie?”

The young man’s face fell.

“Hang it all!” he declared, “I must have

been talking in my sleep. Well, Dad, what do you say ? ”

“ What does Winnie say ? ”

“ I haven’t asked her yet. You don’t suppose I’d go as far as that, without a word to you.”

“ Good lad. I hope, with all my heart, that she’ll say ‘ yes,’ and I don’t think she’ll say ‘ no.’ But no marrying just yet. You must get Part II over first, and make up your mind what you’re going to do.”

For Roll, after shining in the comparative obscurity of the Bloomsbury school, was now a star of the first magnitude in the Cambridge sky. His mathematical career had been a blaze of triumph, and the general opinion was that in the old days he would have been an easy Senior Wrangler. Some, indeed, swore by Copley of John’s, but even they admitted that, taken all round, there could be no comparison between the two. Copley was a first-class calculating machine and little more, but Grimwood was a man, with half a dozen strings to his bow. He was a fine sportsman—he just missed his cricket blue after playing in two or three trial matches, and was pretty sure of his place in the Rugger team next autumn. He only rarely spoke at the Union, but once, at least, he had made the speech of the evening, a hot Radical diatribe, too. Strangest of all, perhaps, he had a great fancy for writing verse, and a certain facility in the art. And then, socially, in spite of his Radicalism, he was extremely popular. Indeed, with his good looks, full purse, and happy



disposition, it could hardly have been otherwise.

It was really wonderful that he had not been spoiled, but, as a matter of fact, it was only the hypercritical who ever accused him of "side" or "swank." Perhaps at one time in his Bloomsbury course he had been a little lifted up, but the responsibilities of the school captaincy in his final year seemed to have a wholesome effect, and he left with the reputation of having been the best-liked captain of a decade.

Another restraining influence was "Uncle Bertie," who, while almost as fond and proud of him as if he had been his own boy, never hesitated for a moment to laugh at the least sign of pretentiousness in "our admirable Crichton." Winnie, too, in the pride of her young beauty and flaming uprightness, set for him a standard that he sometimes found it hard to reach.

She had just attained her majority—the stately phrase suited her exactly. Tall and graceful, she carried herself like a young queen. Her hair was now darker than her mother's, but her complexion was very fair. Her eyes were the rare, real blue, and her features, if they fell short of classic regularity, were yet finely moulded. Her expression in repose was a little cold and austere, but it could blaze with indignation, and soften into a beautiful tenderness.

On this occasion, Roll lost no time. An hour after the brief conversation with his father, he presented himself at The House Opposite.

"Winnie's in the summer-house, writing letters

with her fountain pen," cried Claude, now a sturdy boy of twelve, the very image of what his father was as a schoolboy. "Don't go out to her, Roll. I want you to tinker up my air-gun—the trigger's wrong."

"Not now, old chap," said Roll, releasing his arm from the boy's grasp. "I dare say I'll be able to do it before I go, but I want to speak to Winnie first."

Something in his voice or manner evidently impressed the boy. "Right-O," he said, and turned on his heel, leaving Roll to make his way alone across the lawn to the summer-house.

His approach was noiseless, and it was only when his shadow fell across her paper that Winnie looked up.

He watched her face eagerly, and his own brightened as he marked the smile with which she greeted him.

"But why not flannels?" she asked. "It's just right for tennis, and you promised to teach me that wonderful new serve of yours."

"I don't feel like tennis this afternoon," he answered, sitting down on a deck chair, close by her side.

"You don't mean to say you're not well. I was wondering the other day what you'd be like if you were ill. Let's see: I believe you had measles when we had them; you broke your arm the first year we went to Jersey—you were a bit fractious then——"

"Of course, with a fracture," he interrupted.

"Then you had that bad crock at football—

and I do believe that's all. You're one of the lucky ones, no doubt."

"I don't know so much about that," he answered. "I may have had all kinds of things that I bore in secret without saying a word."

She shook her head vehemently.

"No ; that won't do. Try again."

"Well, if you're right in your facts, it only shows what cruel hard luck I've had. If I'd been allowed my proper share of ailments, I could have shown you how such things ought to be borne. As it is, I've never had a dog's chance."

"I'm glad you haven't, for Uncle Oliver's sake. I can remember what he looked like when you crocked."

"Ah, yes," said Roll, dropping his light tone in a moment. "I forgot that."

Winnie folded her letter, put it in the envelope and wrote the address. Then she looked at Roll.

"Well ? Is there a programme ? "

"I say, Winnie, do you believe in a person having a dual personality ? "

"Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, do you mean ? "

"Yes, only not necessarily good and bad, but just two selves."

Winnie smiled.

"You seem to be different this afternoon from what you usually are. Is this your double self ? "

"I *am* different," he said, "You've never seen me like this before, and you never will again."

"Well, I think I prefer your ordinary self—it's not so alarming."



He made no answer to this, but bent on her a fixed, intent gaze. Just as she was about to protest, he spoke again.

“Do you remember our great quarrel?”

“Yes, indeed I do. I was never so miserable in my life.”

“Nor I. I remember the feeling, as if it were yesterday. I got half frightened of myself at last, I wanted so much to beg your pardon and my self wouldn’t let me.”

“The dual personality again,” she said with a smile.

“And then when we made it up—poor dear Granny was the peacemaker, wasn’t she?—I don’t think I’ve ever felt so happy.”

“Nor I,” she said softly, and the smile grew tender.

“And we said we’d never quarrel any more—we haven’t, have we?”

“No,” she answered, “of course we haven’t.”

“I don’t know about ‘of course’; we’ve both got strong wills.”

“And therefore we keep our promises.”

“There’s a better reason for my keeping that promise.”

“Is there?”

“Yes. It’s because I love you so, Winnie. I think I’ve loved you ever since we were kiddies together. We were like brother and sister then, weren’t we? It’s another kind of love now, with me. Oh, Winnie, can you love me in this new way?”

She looked at him with an expression that he

could not read. Her mood was kind and friendly—that was plain—but he could see no sign of eager passion to match his own.

He took her hand and held it between his hands.

“Winnie,” he said, “we’ve always been frank and straight with each other, but now I feel as if I wanted to turn myself inside out for you to see.”

Her face, which had grown grave, began to relax into a little smile. His heart leapt, and a deeper note trembled in his voice.

“It seems to me as if love for you has been rising in my heart all these years, like a little spring in the hills that grows into a great flood. Once it was so thin and small that I could have said I liked you ; now it is so wide and deep, that I seem to lose myself in it. I can’t see across it or strike to the bottom of it. Oh, Winnie, my darling, love like this must be the most wonderful thing in life ! I couldn’t have believed that life held anything so wonderful.”

It seemed to the girl as she watched the handsome, winning face, and the eyes shining with a light she had never seen before, and heard the voice which was Roll’s and yet not his, that the waters he had spoken of were suddenly surging into her life, a mighty, irresistible flood. He felt her hand, which had lain motionless, begin to stir, as if waking out of sleep. Still she spoke no word.

“Look, Winnie,” he whispered, drawing closer to her, “you know what all this looks like in winter when the sky is grey, and the ground

black, and the wind cold, and the trees nothing but bare, dry wood. Yet even then it has a quiet beauty of its own, and it's a good enough world to live in. But see it when the sun comes, and the leaves, and the flowers, and the blue sky ! Oh, my darling, you can bring the spring, the summer, into our lives ! Won't you, can't you, say the word ? ”

Even as he spoke, her silence, her downcast face, something even in her attitude, struck him as strange. This was not the Winnie of the full, frank gaze and the fearless tongue, or rather it was she with something new, like an atmosphere encompassing her, something gentle, tender, mystical, and surpassingly beautiful, that filled his heart with a fresh thrill of love, so keen and poignant that he could hardly tell whether it were joy or sorrow. But with its advent, all fear and hesitation passed away. He drew her to him and kissed her softly on her lips. For one moment she leaned towards him and her cheek touched his. Then she drew back and raised her eyes, and in the clear, steady gaze that he knew so well, he read a new joy, the mate, he felt, of his own.

“ Dear Roll,” she said, “ we have found each other at last.”

## XVI

It was early in July that Roll and Winnie made up their minds, and the following two or three weeks passed for them like a dream of



unimagined happiness. To Oliver, his boy in the exuberance of his joy seemed like a young god, but with a strain of human tenderness which smiling Apollo could not know. Never, indeed, had the vein of tenderness in the relations between the father and the son been more apparent than in these hours of golden sunshine. Not one of the innumerable little attentions which Roll habitually paid to his father was forgotten or neglected. Winnie, who had long since abandoned her critical attitude towards Oliver, was almost equally anxious that he should not suffer in the least as a result of their engagement. For years Oliver had foreseen and hoped for this development, and he had taken great pains to win the girl's affections.

The first time Winnie came to Grove End Road after the engagement, he gave her a small morocco case.

"There, Winnie," he said, "is a little present for you; not from me, nor from anyone you know."

She opened the case and uttered an exclamation of delight.

"Oh what beauties! And I do love pearls so; they're the only jewels you can really make pets of."

Oliver looked over her shoulder.

"Yes," he said, "they *are* pretty. There's a story goes with them; I'll tell you some day."

"Not now, Uncle Oliver?"

"You'll have to call me 'Dad' now," he corrected her. "No, my dear, not now. When

you're a married woman. They were sent me to give to Roll's mother, but she was dead, poor girl, before they reached me. Now they go to my boy's wife, which would have pleased the giver just as well."

That evening, Bertie came to dinner, and after dinner the two fathers and the two lovers sat up till past midnight discussing the future. Bertie pretended to be shocked at the lack of reticence shown by the young people.

"They're positively brazen," he said, frowning at Roll who, seated on a hassock, was making a pillow of Winnie's lap. "Why, Oliver, when we were young men we had some sense of modesty—at least I had."

Oliver's cheeks flushed, and he looked down.

"We aren't clever enough to be anything but natural," said Roll, with the faintest stress on the pronoun.

"We're just what we've been brought up to be," remarked Winnie.

"And it's really rather interesting to watch," added Oliver.

Bertie shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, if you're going to give away the show, we'd better change the subject. Roll, what do you mean to be? As that young woman's anxious parent, I demand a reply."

"Then you'd better ask *my* anxious parent," answered Roll.

"I think you really ought to make up your mind," said Oliver seriously. "Is it to be science research work?"

“ Well, Dad, Letheridge has been dinning it into me that I ought to go to the bar and try for patent work. He says my maths. and science would be a tremendous help, and I always thought the wig very becoming.”

“ It *does* hide a good lot,” said Bertie reflectively.

“ Take care, Father ! ” exclaimed Winnie, looking hard at the tonsure that was beginning to show on Bertie’s head. “ You’re inviting reprisals.”

“ I think that’s a good idea of Letheridge’s,” said Oliver. “ Then, as soon as you’d finished at the ’varsity, you could marry and set to work in earnest.”

“ My daughter,” declared Bertie loftily, “ will never marry until her husband is making an assured income.”

“ Well,” said Oliver, “ it’s curious how things work in. I’ve had an offer of a berth for you, Roll, as soon as you leave Cambridge—quite a decent berth too, and one that would leave you time to work for the bar.”

“ Sounds like a Government job,” Bertie interposed.

Oliver shook his head, with a pleasant little air of mystery.

“ It’s a private secretaryship with very little to do, but the man’s got a fancy for a Cambridge first-class and a bit of a sport, and he wants a married man.”

“ Decent if dotty,” remarked Roll. “ What’s the screw, Dad ? ”



“ Five hundred a year and rooms in the house.”

“ Oh, a mental case ! ” murmured Bertie.

But Roll had pulled himself upright on his hassock and was looking hard at his father.

“ Does he live at Land’s End ? ” he asked.

Oliver looked round.

“ No,” he answered. “ Within the four-mile radius.”

“ So’s Grove End Road. Do you really mean it, Dad ? ”

“ Yes, of course I do,” answered Oliver.

“ Well, of all the— Here, I’m too big to do it myself. Winnie, will you oblige me by kissing the gentleman for me ? ”

“ Was there ever anybody like him, Winnie ? ” said Roll, when the seniors had considerately left them to say good night to each other.

“ He *is* wrapped up in you. It makes me feel as if I’d have to cry sometimes, when I see him looking at you.”

“ I could have bitten out my tongue when I found I’d called him dotty, but that really was his own doing. He was too clever for all of us. You *are* fond of him, aren’t you, Winnie ? If the two people I love best on earth didn’t love one another, I’d enlist and pray for a big war.”

“ Don’t talk like that, Roll. I’m more than fond of him. I love him dearly.”

## XVII

Within three weeks' time Roll's heedless speech had been invested with a sinister significance. Politics were not often discussed at Grove End Road. Oliver had never been much of a party man—as far as he was anything, he inclined to a sentimental Conservatism. Roll, however, had of late struck out for himself as a rampant Radical, and Winnie, following her father, held the same creed.

Suddenly, as July drew to a close, the shadow of imminent disaster began to fall over Europe. Oliver and Roll had agreed to accompany Bertie and his tribe to Ostend, and their new motor-car was to cross with them. Oliver had taken lessons and was becoming quite an expert driver, while Roll had nerve enough to dispense with lessons. Their rooms were engaged for August the 4th, but, a week before, Bertie paid what seemed a heavy fine to be quit of the contract. Oliver chaffed him gently for his pessimism.

“It's like the creaky door and the threatened man,” he said. “You'll see ; Armageddon won't come in our time.”

But the days went by, and every day made it plainer that Armageddon had come at last. Germany and Russia, then France, then England and Austria, and so the cockpit was filled, and the kings came and fought by the waters of Megiddo.

Vivien had been suffering from a sharp attack

of tonsilitis, and Claude was not quite up to the mark, so Brighton instead of Ostend received the family, and there Oliver and Roll joined them.

It was a strange holiday. Rotha was busy with her invalids. Roll and Winnie generally paired off, leaving Bertie and Oliver to do the like. At meal-times they all came back laden with newspapers, and the war was the one subject of conversation. They all talked except Rotha, who did most of the carving, being convinced that she made the joints "go farther" than anyone else could, and very often they all talked together. All of them, except Rotha, had their own maps, and the carpet-sweeper generally carried off a harvest of little flags.

But about the end of the first week, one voice dropped out of the chorus.

"Have you noticed," Oliver asked Bertie, "how silent Roll has become, all of a sudden?"

"Now you speak of it, I believe he has," answered Bertie. "I hope it isn't a touch of tonsilitis."

"I hope it is," Oliver answered, "it's a nice, long, slow, safe sort of thing."

At that very moment Roll and Winnie were sitting together on the beach in a quiet spot which they had been lucky enough to find.

"What's the matter, Roll?" she asked. "You haven't said a pretty thing to me for twenty-four hours. Have you used all your stock?"

He looked up with a smile, but it died away before he spoke.



“Winnie, my own dear love, I’m at my wits’ end and there’s no one to help me but you.”

A shadow seemed to pass across the girl’s face, but she only said softly,

“Tell me, Roll dear.”

“This war, Winnie. I hate war. It’s the maddest, foulest, wickedest crime, but—what could we do?”

“No,” she said, “we couldn’t keep out of it.”

“Then how can I? It’ll be no child’s play, this war. They’ll want all the men they can get, and the men are beginning to roll up. I had a letter from Craven last night. He’s applied for a commission, and so have Buck and Northey. I’ll *have* to go, Winnie, sooner or later, and it’s a poor thing waiting till shame drives you out. Ever since that speech of Grey’s, I’ve known it. There’s no answer. We couldn’t let Belgium go to the wall, and we’ve all got to do our share. I’m young and strong, and I’ve had an easy time of it so far. I can’t stop at home and let the other fellows bear the brunt while I’m wrapped in cotton wool. How could I marry you, my darling, with a stain like that upon me?”

Winnie’s face had gone white and her voice fell to a whisper.

“Stain or no stain, I would marry you, but if you hear the call you must obey it. But—oh, Roll, we were so happy! And what will your father say?”

“Ah, that’s the misery of it. I haven’t dared to tell him. I feel as if I belong, not to myself, but to him and to you, and even more to him

than to you—you see what I mean, don't you, dearest? He's been both father and mother to me all these years. You know a lot, but even you don't know nearly all. You do know, though, what he was about our marriage, and that's just what he's been, ever since I was a nipper. If I go, it will half break his heart—I know it will. He won't prevent me, he won't say 'no'—I almost wish he would. If he did, I should obey him, stain or no stain. And then there's you. It makes me feel a coward, Winnie, when I think of you."

"Then you must learn to think of me differently," she said, her eyes shining with a new glow of pride and resolution. "We both of us hate war, but we both of us think England couldn't keep out of it. Well, then, we must do our part. I must give you, and you, my hero, my love, you must give yourself. And your father—I believe he'll say the same."

Roll caught her hand and kissed it passionately.

Yes, my own dear love, we *will* give, and we're not the only ones who find a joy in giving. My heart tells me that God is going to give us back to each other—I am certain of it—as sure as I am of the call."

"As He wills," she said softly, and then added: "Who is it says that there is a strange joy in great ventures? I believe it's true."

"But how am I to tell Father?" sighed Roll.

## XVIII

The holiday was not a long one. They all felt that it was hopelessly spoilt by the shadow of the war, and most of them were anxious to be doing something that might help. So, leaving Rotha with the two invalids, Bertie, Oliver, Winnie, and Roll came back at the end of a fortnight.

The shadow fell heavily on the house in Grove End Road. For the first time in Roll's experience there lay a gulf between his father and him. They talked at meals, discussed the day's news, argued about the military position, and studied their maps, but all the time they were miserably conscious that they were far apart; between them was a barrier, intangible, but all the more insuperable for that. Something was being kept back that ought to have been spoken.

Of the two, Roll made by far the better show. On Oliver the blow had fallen with crushing force. He knew from the first that the boy would want to go, and his heart told him only too surely what the end would be. And with this knowledge all his long-cherished faith in God and trust in life came clattering about his ears. In a moment, it seemed, his whole outlook upon life was changed again. The long respite was over, and once more he was face to face with failure, this time utter and irremediable. And this time, he felt, he could not reproach himself for idleness or fickleness. With all his heart and all his mind he had striven to do the best for his



boy, and his reward had been great, far beyond his hopes or dreams. And now, just as a new vista of happiness seemed to have opened before his eyes, this black cloud had lowered and blotted it out. Here was no blind chance, but a clear, deliberate purpose, and the cold, persistent cruelty of it shook him not simply with fear but with horror. He, poor fool, had been fancying all these years that life, or the Providence that orders it, was accepting his penitence, encouraging his efforts, and leading him through the door of Hope out of the valley of Judgment. Fool indeed! He had staked all his happiness on his boy, and it was through his boy that he was to be struck down.

For of the issue he had no doubt at all. If Roll went—and go he would—it would be to his death; he felt a certain dreary satisfaction in using plain, blunt words. And all his gifts and graces: his handsome face, his radiant smile, his sunny disposition, his strong will, his splendid abilities, all these would be poured out with his warm young blood on some French or Belgian battlefield. His very fearlessness only made his doom the more assured.

Meanwhile Roll mooned about with a strange, preoccupied air utterly unlike his usual eager, buoyant manner. His efforts to be natural and cheerful were a pitiful failure. Only when Winnie appeared did he come to himself, and even then Oliver was sensible of a difference—there was an understanding between them from which he was shut out. And all the time he

knew it was only the taint of the old cowardice that kept him from having it out with the boy. "He won't speak first because he's afraid of hurting me," he told himself, and indeed he was right.

But one afternoon Roll came into the study with an evening paper in his hand.

"There's a bit of me, Dad," he said, handing it to his father. "Don't laugh at it, will you?"

Oliver saw that it was a copy of verses, printed in large type and signed "R. G." "The Call," it was headed, and the lines ran—

"Mothers' hearts are filled with boding  
Over half the world to-day,  
For the boys they bore in travail,  
'Must we lose them now?' they say.

Sturdy-limbed and gallant-hearted,  
They have risen and said farewell,  
Gone with scarce a glance behind them,  
Gone, but whither, who can tell?

For a mother-voice is calling,  
Louder, deeper than our own,  
Wheresoe'er the name is honoured,  
Wheresoe'er the flag is flown;

From the islands of the Northland  
To the islands of the South,  
From the continent of ice-fields  
To the continents of drouth,

Crying, *Sons of my begetting,*  
*Proud of me as I of you,*  
*Leave the field, the workshop, office,*  
*Here is work for men to do.*

*Beat your ploughshares into sword-blades,  
And your pruning-hooks to spears,  
That both sword and spear may perish,  
Useless, in the coming years.*

*On the field and on the waters,  
With the great voice of the guns,  
You shall speak for God and duty,  
As beseemeth England's sons.*

So she calls them, she the mighty  
Mother of the sea-girt race,  
And the mother of the soldier  
Sends him forth with tearless face."

Oliver laid down the paper.

"Is that how you feel, Roll?" he asked.

"Yes, Father, it is." The tone was humble—almost apologetic.

"Mother, mother," Oliver repeated. "You don't say anything about the father."

"You've been both to me," Roll said softly.

"Fill me a pipe," Oliver asked him. With the old cowardly instinct he was playing for time, scared of the irrevocable words that trembled on his lips. He watched the fingers, generally so quick and sure, that now fumbled sadly over the simple job. At last the pipe was filled. As Roll handed it to his father, their eyes, that for days had turned away from each other, met.

"I won't go, Father, if you tell me not to," he whispered.

"If you feel like that, I suppose you must go, my boy," answered Oliver, and his voice sounded strange in his own ears.



## XIX

Some lingering hope, hardly acknowledged even to himself, Oliver secretly entertained that Bertie might, on Winnie's behalf, veto Roll's decision. On the contrary, he heartily approved, nearly wrung Roll's hand off, and wished him God-speed and a safe return. Thereupon Oliver acquiesced in what he felt to be his doom. He did more—he forced himself to take an active part in the discussions which ensued as to what service and what regiment Roll should enter. Every word stabbed him, but for once he put all his old powers of dissimulation to good use, and even Roll did not suspect how keenly his father was suffering. Only Winnie had her doubts, and she kept them to herself.

The Army Medical Corps was Roll's choice.

"They want men badly, they tell me," he said, "and I'd a thousand times sooner help to save life than to destroy it. And there's plenty of danger."

He, his father, and Bertie were smoking in the study at Grove End Road. Oliver got up and walked to the window.

Roll's face expressed disgust with himself.

"I'm sorry I said that, Dad," he exclaimed. "You know what I mean, don't you? The 'poultice-wallahs' are a bit looked down upon, but in a real war it's no soft job. And it's a poor kind of creature that would try for a soft job now. But you needn't be afraid for me, Dad."

I shall come back, like the bad shilling. I'm not the sort that the gods love."

Oliver could not trust himself to answer, and Bertie struck in.

"I believe I've got an uncle or a cousin who's a major at Netley. I'll write to him; he may be useful. You know you can't get a commission?"

"Yes, I know that," answered Roll, "but I'd rather go through the mill from the bottom. I've signed on as a private."

"Good lad!" exclaimed Bertie heartily. "You're the right stuff. Had any letters from the front?"

"Yes. I had a letter from Buck yesterday. He's in the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. He'd just had his first bit of real fighting."

"And what did he think of it?"

"He says it's the finest sport he's ever seen. Here's his letter: 'I got a graze on the right shoulder from a bullet, but I pipped two Deutschers and all but bagged a third. Never enjoyed myself so much in my life.'"

"He's a cool hand," remarked Bertie.

"Wonderful!" said Oliver.

"Rather beastly, if you ask me," declared Roll. "I can't stand man-killing as sport. It harks back to the jungle, a little too much, for my fancy."

"It's a bit worse, I'm afraid, if you come to think of it," Bertie commented. "In the jungle it's hunger, not sport."

"And here it's patriotism perhaps, after all," said Roll. "I'll be bound old Buck was in a blue funk all the time."

## XX

In a week or two, Roll went off to Aldershot for his training, and Oliver was left with Chumley and the other maids. As long as Roll was with him he had, by a great effort, made quite a brave show of cheerfulness. Now, left alone, he gave up the attempt, and abandoned himself once more, as in the old days, to his fears and self-reproaches. "Fear," indeed, is hardly the word, so clearly and positively could he foresee what was coming. Roll taken from him, Justice would at last be satisfied. Cutlin's grim message often recurred to his mind—"The wages of sin is death, and God Almighty is the paymaster." It was his sin that was slaying his boy, and bringing the bitterest sorrow on Winnie.

The thought of the imminent tragedy unnerved him. How should he live through the dreadful days that were close at hand? With Cain he cried out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

There were times when one way of escape occurred to him—the only one. But was it really a way of escape? Even if he had the courage—or the callousness—to make the attempt, who could forecast the issue? No; his doom—he could see it quite clearly—was to outlive all whom he had loved and every hope that had brightened his way, and then to die at last, a miserable, cowardly failure.

He was confirmed in this gloomy prescience by



the contrast between his boy's attitude at this national crisis and his own. He did not share Roll's hatred of war as a crime against humanity. He accepted it as one of the disagreeable but necessary facts of life. Yet Roll was going out to take his share, fearless, if not blithe, while he stayed at home, shuddering at horrors nothing would ever have induced him to face. So the young, the strong, the brave, would be taken, while he would be left to cumber the ground.

In spite of his misery, the days passed swiftly. Roll was an excellent letter-writer, and he came up to town whenever he could find a chance. Bertie, Rotha, Winnie, and the younger ones were constant visitors, and often Oliver took his car down to Harrow. Strangely enough, the car was a great comfort. His chauffeur was an expert, and his outspoken praise of Oliver's driving gave his master no little satisfaction. Even in this dark hour, his appetite for success—no matter of how humble a kind—was still keen. He was specially pleased when the man, more than once, congratulated him on his nerve. As a matter of fact, in one case there had been no time for hesitation, and the turn of the wheel that meant safety had been instinctive rather than deliberate. In the other case, he had been in an agony of fright, but the fear of betraying himself had made him desperate. Then it was that Peters the chauffeur had forgotten his manners in astonishment and admiration.

“Good Lord, sir,” he exclaimed, “you ’ave got a nerve! It’s only once that we’ll ever be

nearer to death than we were just then. I'm all of a sweat now, and you 'aven't turned a hair."

"Oh come, it wasn't as bad as all that," Oliver answered. He could hear his own voice tremble, and he wondered whether Peters was laughing at him. When he realised that the man's tribute was a genuine one he felt as though, on his car, he would never again know fear. As for the Aldershot road, it was soon as familiar to him as his own back garden.

About the middle of October, Roll wrote that drafts were crossing the Channel pretty often, and that his turn might come any day. Also, he added, he had got leave for the next Saturday. So the car whirled down to Aldershot in the morning and brought father and son straight to Harrow.

"And didn't we buzz along, too?" said Roll at luncheon. "Jehu wouldn't have been in it with Father. It was the finest run I've ever had."

"We'll see what we can do to-night," Oliver answered. Roll's pleasure in the spin and the boy's high spirits had been irresistible. For the moment, at any rate, the cloud had lifted. Everyone else was resolutely cheerful. Winnie's eyes may have been a little too bright, and Bertie's jocularities just a trifle forced, but courage was in the air, and each helped the other.

When the car was brought round again about five o'clock in the afternoon, and Oliver and Roll got in, Winnie was missing from the group at the gate that waved farewell, and Roll's face was

grave and set. But there was no tremor in his voice as he shouted his *au revoir*.

They went back to Grove End Road to pick up some of Roll's luggage, and it was past seven when they began the run to Aldershot.

On the way up from Harrow, Roll had been very quiet and Oliver had made no attempt to break the silence. Even now, it was not till they had left the shops and streets and lights of town and suburb, and were bowling smoothly along between the low, grey hedges, that Roll began to talk.

"Father," he said, and Oliver could detect at once the note of effort in his voice, "it is good of you to let me go."

Oliver was already in the trough of reaction, and he felt he could not talk of the parting, with all that it implied to him.

"We won't speak of it now," he said. "It may be a long while before you go, after all. It's no good meeting trouble half-way."

"I'd rather meet it half-way than have it spring upon me in the dark. Father, that's one thing that's made me rather miserable lately. Ever since this war broke out, I've felt as if something had come between us, and I hate the feeling. You do know how I feel about it, don't you? I love you and Winnie so much that it's an awful wrench to leave you both, even for a time. But I know I shall come back—I'm absolutely sure of it, and I hope you'll neither of you have to be ashamed of me. And it is a fine thing to feel that your country needs you



and calls you, and that you haven't stopped your ears. Yet I have this dreadful feeling that you don't really sympathise with me, that you would rather I hadn't gone, that I'm hurting you, and that makes me more wretched than I've ever felt before."

The tone of his voice told Oliver as much as the words—more, perhaps. The boy was really suffering, and it was his father who was responsible. What Roll had just said was very nearly the truth, or rather, had been, for instantly Oliver vowed to himself that it should be true no longer.

"You know what I am, Roll," he answered. "The old weakness, after all these years! But I know you're right, and you can't help hurting me."

Roll groaned.

"Oh, Dad," he cried, "is that the best you can say?"

A new thought flashed into Oliver's mind. Surely God was good and just. Surely the punishment of his sins would not be visited on Roll and Winnie. Might he not now be suffering his punishment, and might not Roll and Winnie after all escape? And if his boy did indeed come back in safety, having offered both life and love on the altar of duty, with what new, measureless pride and affection would he look upon him?

He spoke tenderly, gravely, with almost a touch of solemnity in his voice.

"I can say this, Roll. If you hadn't hurt me,

I don't think I could ever have loved you quite as much as I do now."

"Dear Dad!" exclaimed the boy softly. "You have made me happy again. And Winnie said almost the same thing."

## XXI

Oliver received his first post-card from the front with a sinking heart. The cold, formal print, and the cruel suggestions of such lines as, "I have been admitted into hospital {<sup>sick</sup><sub>wounded</sub>}," though crossed out by the sender, made him shiver. And when, after a long delay in transmission, a letter reached him, he found poor comfort in the contents. For though Roll was less reserved than most young men of his age, the novelty of his surroundings and the horror by which he was confronted, evidently, for the moment, dominated his mind, so that there was room for little else. The descriptions of the bare and blackened country, of the unburied dead, and of the wounded with their poor torn, mutilated bodies, haunted the father's waking and sleeping hours. He pictured himself brought face to face with such terrors, and he felt once more the vague, innumerable apprehensions, and the shuddering agonies of fear.

"I was in a deadly funk at first," the letter said, "but somehow I managed to stick it. Now I've got my second wind. It's pitiful and it's dreadful, but it's fine too, for the men are so

splendid and everyone seems pitched an octave higher (that's a metaphor for Winnie) than in dear, comfortable old England."

"Ah, what it must be to be brave!" Oliver sighed to himself. "I could almost envy my own boy, God bless him!"

Bertie's cousin, Major Fletwick, had taken a keen interest in Roll and his enlistment, and more than once the car had borne him up and down from Netley to St. John's Wood. It was on one of these runs that Oliver showed him Roll's letter.

"Yes," he said, "he's a fine lad—one in a thousand, by all I hear. I hope he'll take up medicine and stick to the Corps. With his brains and pluck and everything, he'd be bound to come to the front."

Oliver could not keep back a sigh.

"Ah," he answered, "I can't see beyond this dreadful war!"

The Major was childless and cheerful.

"Pooh!" he exclaimed. "Don't you worry; the boy'll come back as safe as a trivet. He's one of the born lucky; anyone can see that."

Then, priding himself on his tact, he turned the conversation.

"This is a topping car of yours," he remarked. "I've been in a good many, but this strikes me as about the best of the lot. What's the H.P.?"

"Twenty-five—thirty."

"Ah; I thought somewhere about that. And you've got her well in hand. It's wonderful what a lot there is in that. I don't know how



it is. A car will go smooth and sweet for one man and jolt and jar like a market cart for another. I suppose it's a knack, and, by Jove, you've got it. You're outside the limit now, *I* know, but we're as steady as an operating table. I wonder you don't take her across. They'd give you a commission like a shot, and you'd be able to keep an eye on the young 'un."

## XXII

All the way back from Netley, the Major's words rang on Oliver's ears: *They'd give you a commission, and you'd be able to keep an eye on the young 'un.* "So this is what I've taken to motoring for," he said to himself. When Bertie had laughed at his devotion to the latest craze, he had joined in the laugh against himself. It *did* seem rather absurd, at his age. Now he understood. It was no laughing matter. It was just part of some miraculously perfect plan in which he, and Roll, and all of them, were being pushed about like pawns on a board. He felt that the time was very near when the plan would become manifest in its workings. If the Major were right, this motoring hobby might bring him and his boy together again at the last supreme moment. The hope he had begun to entertain, that his punishment might be something less than losing Roll, faded away. Cutlin's lowering face gloomed threateningly upon him—"The wages of sin is death, and God Almighty is the paymaster."

Well, if this were so, why should he struggle against Omnipotence? His staying at home would not help Roll, and that was the only thing that really mattered. Nay, whatever agony it might involve, surely it would be better to say good-bye to the lad than to be far away when the end came and leave him to die among strangers. Anything would be better than this intolerable burden of a life out of which all the savour had gone, except the bitterness of one terrible, overmastering anxiety.

That night, before he went to bed, he wrote to Major Fletwick asking by what procedure his suggestion could most quickly be carried out. Within a fortnight the War Office was satisfied as to his qualifications, and more than satisfied with his car, and he was duly gazetted Second Lieutenant.

He wrote at once to tell Roll, but from the others he guarded his secret jealously. The truth was, that as soon as he had committed himself, he was assailed by a whole legion of doubts and fears. He recalled a score of incidents of which he had read in the papers, instances of fortitude and daring which he knew were utterly beyond him. Why, before a week was out he would be a byword and a laughing-stock! Worse still, he would disgrace Roll, and his quick imagination instantly pictured the boy's distress and shame. Fool that he was, to court one more, and this surely the most degrading of all his failures!

But he could not leave England without telling



those whom, next to Roll, he loved best in the world. The evening before he left for France he went down to Harrow in a new car which he had just bought, a smaller one than the first, but a perfect little beauty. He had planned to get there well before supper and escape the meal, but his petrol ran short, and he reached The House Opposite just as the family were sitting down to their meal.

His entry made a huge sensation. Bertie stared as if he had seen a ghost. Rotha gave a little scream. Winnie sprang up and kissed him. Vivien followed suit, while Claude relieved his feelings by clapping his hands loudly and stamping on the floor.

“You in khaki!” Bertie gasped. “Well, of all the——”

“An officer, too!” shouted Claude. “Look at his shoulder straps!”

“Do sit down and tell us,” Rotha pleaded.

“I mustn’t stay long,” he said. “I’ve left my car outside.”

“In the light of this extraordinary proceeding,” Bertie remarked, “I shall have to reconsider my own position.”

“Oh no, you won’t,” answered Vivien, “you’ve got a wife and three children.”

“Yes, that’s right,” said Oliver. “My family’s abroad”—he managed to conjure up a smile—“and I don’t like being so far away from it.”

“Well, Life’s aoner!” exclaimed Bertie. “Fancy her turning you out a soldier—you.”

“She hasn’t,” Oliver replied. “She’s turned



me out a chauffeur, which is a very different thing, and just about what I'm fit for."

"Soldier or not, I'm proud of you," said Bertie. "You'll be getting the D.S.O. or the V.C. before we know where we are."

As soon as supper was over, Oliver declared he must be off.

"Well, God bless you, old chap!" said Bertie, "and the family too. I hope you'll come across each other soon."

Oliver managed to leave Winnie to the last.

"It's your birthday next week," he said, "and I've bought you a little present. Come to the gate with me alone and I'll show you it."

So Winnie came out to where the car was waiting.

"Oh what a love of a car!" she cried.

"I'm glad you like it," he said. "It's the little present; from Roll and me."

She drew him under the shade of a big tree and threw her arms round his neck.

"Oh, you dear, kind Father," she exclaimed. "Thank you, a thousand times. Every time I ride in it, I'll think of you both and pray for you."

Even in the darkness he could see the flush on her cheeks and the light in her eyes. His heart smote him, as he thought of what might be in store for her.

"Yes, my dear," he said, "pray for us. Who knows what power such prayers as yours may have?"

## XXIII

It was well into January when Oliver found himself and his Napier in the North of France.

The conditions were about as bad as they could be. The roads were sometimes iron with frost, but broken up by great shell holes that demanded ceaseless vigilance, sometimes churned up by a thaw into a river bed of mud in which progress was difficult, if not actually impossible. The rain, the snow, and the icy winds tried the strongest, and Oliver was no Hercules. Indeed, after the easy, leisured life he had led for so many years, it was remarkable that he withstood the sudden strain as well as he did, or seemed to. But there were certain compensations that helped him greatly.

For one thing, the thought that at last he was able to be of some use in the world cheered and strengthened him. It might so easily have been otherwise. But for that chance remark of the Major's he might now have been mooning idly about on quiet English roads, eating his heart out with impotent anxiety. Here at any rate there was plenty to keep his thoughts busy with the affairs of the moment. Here, too, quick as ever to receive impressions from those around him, he soon began to catch the war fever. His heart leapt at the plain tales of heroic deeds told by those who spoke from the evidence of eye and ear. Praise had always been very sweet to him, and when Major Marchfield of the Rangers



swore that he would sooner trust him than any "bloomin' Brooklander," he felt a real thrill of joy. His open-handed generosity in the presence of suffering won him not only gratitude, but a host of acquaintances who promised to turn very soon into friends.

But best of all, by far, was the thought of the almost ecstatic joy with which Roll had welcomed the news of his father's arrival at the front. The jubilation, the pride, the affection, which jostled each other in the boy's next letter, made his father first laugh and then cry. But he read it over, a score of times, and found in it both balm and incense.

For the first two or three weeks his work lay well behind the firing line, and it was only the half-healed scar of past fighting that he saw. But one day at the beginning of February he had to take a party of officers to a village not far from Soissons, where General —— had his headquarters. Then, for the first time, he came under fire, and the booming of the heavy guns and the scream of the shells filled him with abject terror. Only the coolness of the others and the fear of being laughed at saved him from open and utter disgrace. It was a bitter disappointment. He had really begun to think—partly as a result of his chauffeur's praise—that he had outgrown his old cowardice. Now he knew that there was no essential change. He was still the same timid, neurotic weakling who had excited the contempt and disgust of his old schoolmaster.



Still, it was impossible to retreat. Every letter from Roll, or from Winnie or Bertie or Rotha, bound him the faster to his work. Once he saw Roll, just for a single happy hour.

"Oh, I *am* glad you came out, Father," he exclaimed. "It was so splendid of you! I'm afraid you're overworked, though," he added; "you look thin and worn."

"I can't honestly return the compliment," answered Oliver. "You look in the pink of condition."

"So I am, and so I ought to be. Out in the open, all day, plenty of exercise, good food, and heaps of clean clothes—I don't believe any other army was ever so well looked after."

"Well, so far, you do them credit, I must admit," said Oliver, only half reassured by the boy's high spirits.

It was a week since the meeting, and, as it happened, Oliver's work had taken him into no more perils. Again a little confidence began to return, though the voice of the guns still brought his heart into his mouth. But his skill as a driver remained unaffected, and the encomiums he earned were many and loud.

Many of his long journeys were solitary, and often at night time, when there was no special cause for apprehension, he found his mind traveling back to the days of his childhood and youth. So frequent and so full did these reminiscences become, that at last it seemed to him as if in some strange way he were actually living the past over again. Round him gathered figures

he had not seen for many a year. His father, Mrs. Bannock, Sophie—as a child—and her mother, Dr. Arkwright and Miss Philippa, Kate the housemaid; these were his constant companions. Of the intermediate period, of his Eastbourne days, of Mount and his crew, of Ethel and her family, he hardly ever thought. But, gradually, his companions on these lonely journeys thinned to three or four. His father was constantly with him, Mrs. Bannock as she was in the days of his boyhood, and Sophie—hers was a kind of composite presentment, the child and the grown woman replacing, and sometimes accompanying each other with the unfettered inconsequence of a dream. Cutlin too was often present, and always with the gloomy, lowering face of his farewell visit.

The strangest feature of these appearances, or reappearances, was that neither Winnie nor even Roll himself was among them. It seemed as though the past had tidings of some imminent crisis and were claiming Oliver as its own.

## XXIV

On the last Sunday in February, Oliver was billeted at St. Alary, some sixty or seventy miles south-west of Furnes. Both he and his machine had been out of sorts. The unusual strain and the inevitable hardships were finding out the weak spots in a physique that had few

strong ones, and the results were a pretty constant headache and a cough that reminded him of his early days. As for the Napier, it had been running under protest for a week, and the two days that Oliver spent in bed only just allowed of its being put in decent order again.

On the evening of the second day, Oliver came down, feeling weak but a good deal fresher, and, after dinner, walked round to the garage and examined his car. As he crossed the road on his way back, an orderly came up to him holding out a telegram.

"Captain Johnson sent me with this, sir," he said. "It has only just come."

The receipt of a telegram was not an unusual incident, and Oliver had no premonition of bad news, as he opened it. It was addressed to him, and ran :

"Regret to inform you that your son Pte. Grimwood R.A.M.C. dangerously wounded is at hospital Avermes. Come at once, if possible."

He turned back instantly to the garage.

"Have her ready in ten minutes," he said, and hurried off to headquarters.

As it happened, there were no instructions for him, and he had no difficulty in obtaining leave to take his car over to Avermes. His face was more eloquent than any words. Within half an hour the car was ready and her head turned towards the north road. Captain Johnson saw him off.

"Don't worry, till you know," he counselled. "They always put 'dangerously,' to save their



faces if anything goes wrong. By the time you reach Avermes it'll be 'severely,' and by the time you leave, 'slightly.' ” Then the Major lowered his voice. “ If he's really bad, stay there, and wire or 'phone. I'll make it all right for you, up here. If it's not much, get back as soon as possible. Off you go. Good luck ! ”

Oliver knew the road well, or rather the roads, for there were two after about ten miles. The longer was the safer. The other, which saved from fifteen to twenty miles, ran perilously near the fighting area, and, under ordinary conditions, he would have given it a wide berth. To-night, he never hesitated for a moment. In his mind there was room for only one thought—Roll, Roll, Roll.

For with the telegram there had come a great change. The past had receded, and in an instant he was living eagerly, intensely, in the present. Now, indeed, all the old forebodings, transformed, it seemed, into black certainties of doom, swept into his heart with outspread wings and made night there. The rushing wheels, the throb and beat of the engine, the sough of the wind in the telegraph wires overhead, all blended into one strange, weird accompaniment to the words which a loud menacing voice was thundering in his ears—*The wages of sin is death, and God Almighty is the paymaster.* Yes, it was true, and the omnipotent Austerity would pay to the very uttermost farthing.

But though he knew that his boy was to be taken from him—slain by his father's sins—none

the less was he consumed by a raging anxiety to see him before the end. The figure of the young man as he had seen him only a week or two before, full of life and vigour and courage and cheerfulness, rose before him. He *must* hold the living hand again, look once more into the living eyes and see the love and forgiveness there. For though God might not—could not, perhaps—forgive, Roll would, he was sure. He would whisper into his boy's ear that he was dying to atone for his father's sins, and Roll would forgive—he was certain of it.

Then the thought of Winnie struck him, and of the love that was never to come to its full fruition. He had hopelessly marred the lives of the two whom he loved best. Was life all tragedy? Indeed it seemed so, for all round him were the signs of violence, cruelty, and woe. And then a smile, half cynical, half wistful, curled his lips. *Trust life*, Sophie had said. Poor Sophie!

The road was good, and the car was running well. This was Vitrey, and just beyond the church the road forked. Sharp to the right was the quicker way, and without a moment's hesitation he took it. It was a cold evening with a bitter north wind. The sky was cloudy but the clouds were thin, and behind them the full moon was rising. The road was growing rougher, and, in spite of his eagerness, he was obliged to slacken speed. Before long, an ominous growl from the east reminded him that he was nearing the danger zone, and in spite of his preoccupation he felt an involuntary thrill of

fear. Then he thought of Roll and pressed the accelerator.

The white road now ran through a wood where the shadows lay black as pools of ink. The voices of the guns grew louder and angrier, and he could distinctly hear the screech of the shells.

As he swept round a bend, he saw at the end of a long stretch a big car that had been coming in the opposite direction and had, apparently, broken down. He put on his brakes and stopped abreast. From behind it appeared a man in the uniform of an English officer.

"Here's a bit of good luck," the stranger exclaimed joyfully. "One has to be careful, and I was doing a bit of hide and seek. Why, dash my buttons, if it isn't Grimwood!"

His face was in shadow but the voice was unmistakable. It was Marchfield, and Oliver, who was punctilious, saluted.

"Had a breakdown?" he asked.

Marchfield laughed, but as he moved, Oliver noticed that he limped.

"Yes," he answered. "Something smashed. It's lucky it wasn't I. Where are you for?"

"Avermes."

Marchfield whistled.

"Door shut," he said. "Uhlans ahead—a regular Lord Mayor's Show of 'em. I just ripped through them a minute or two ago. I'm afraid they're in a temper now."

But Oliver was already chafing at the delay. He could hear Roll calling him in a voice that was growing weak.



“What are you going to do?” he asked. “Are you going to tinker her up? I must be off. Have you got spanners and things? I can leave you my kit.”

“And you mean to take them from the rear and pip them a second time? Good Lord! but you’re hot stuff, Grimwood. I never dreamt you were such a fire-eater. But you mustn’t do it, all the same; it would be sheer suicide. I tell you what. There’s a way round by Vitrey. You can drop me there, and go on to Avermes.”

“No,” said Oliver. “My boy’s badly wounded and it takes twice as long. I’m going straight on.”

Marchfield laughed.

“Are you, by Jove?” he exclaimed. “Then I’ll have another go at the beggars myself. Just let me get my pop-gun. We’ll catch them up before they get to Pouilly. They’ll never expect to see me again. I remember this car of yours—it’s a scorcher.”

The road hereabouts had widened and was quite good going, so Oliver worked up speed, and they fairly flew along. Marchfield talked incessantly, while he overhauled his magazine rifle and his Browning pistol. Luckily, he was one of those talkers who can dispense with an answer, for Oliver had no idea what he was saying. His heart and soul and mind and strength were all fixed on Roll. And yet he felt that his father and Sophie were with him, urging him on. “Faster! Faster!” they cried in his ear. Suddenly a squall struck them—

sleet that turned to hail, and a fierce wind that moaned and shrieked through the trees. The tumult of the elements, and the roar of the guns, louder now than ever, silenced Marchfield, but not the voices urging "Faster! Faster!"

Here the road was rough, and the car rocked and bumped and jolted alarmingly. "Hadn't you better ease up a bit?" Marchfield shouted. He might just as well have asked his rifle. On they tore, Oliver's face still and set, as if hewn out of stone. Something in his expression frightened Marchfield.

"I believe he's going off his head," he said to himself.

The next moment his own head was thrust forward eagerly.

"Yes," he shouted, "there they are—I can hear them. Round that turn, and we're into them. Bet you my D.S.O."

He was right. As they rushed the curve, they saw, a long way ahead, a troop of horsemen, by the dust behind them, evidently moving pretty fast.

"Now!" yelled Marchfield. "It's neck or nothing. They've heard us. Give her her head. Let her rip!"

Oliver flung the throttle wide open. Till that moment, he had never realised what his car could do. It gave a bound forward that flung Marchfield down on his face and nearly shot Oliver out altogether. It swayed and quivered and trembled, and, like some incredibly swift-darting tongue, licked up the white strip of road.

It seemed as though the Germans were galloping towards and not away from them. As Marchfield sprang up, half a dozen sharp reports rang out and Oliver felt something streak past his ear. Marchfield began firing and the next moment they were in the thick of it.

It was all over in a few seconds, but into that brief space of time were crowded the elemental passions and wild, fierce savagery of the battlefield—the smoke and angry flashes of the shots, the shouts, half snarl, half roar, and one awful high-pitched cry of an animal in pain. The squall had ceased, and the moon shone out to show a red stripe along the white riband of road. The car gave a frightful lurch as if it were going over on its side. A big German threw himself, or was thrown, half across the door. His face was ashen, his eyes glared horribly, his curved fingers like claws clutched at the frame. Then the car righted itself, flung him off, and in a moment had left the red litter of wounded, maimed, and killed far behind.

“ Phew ! ” exclaimed Marchfield, “ that was peppermint—curiously strong, if you like. You all right ? ”

“ Yes, I think so, dear boy,” answered Oliver, who was dazed, and had a queer, dream-like feeling that this was Roll and yet Marchfield at the same time.

Marchfield opened his eyes and looked hard at his companion.

“ You’re about the pluckiest I’ve come across



yet," he said, "and it's strange—I don't mind telling you now—I began by putting you down for the other thing. Those were von Erding's Bavarians—I thought they were, the first time; now I know it. Unless I'm very much mistaken they'll be glad to know that at headquarters. There's many a man gets his D.S.O. for less than you've done to-night, and I'll take care the right people get to hear of it. But I say, old man, aren't we buzzing along a trifle too fast, now we've done our little job?"

"I want to get to Avermes," answered Oliver, speaking in a dull mechanical voice that contrasted strangely with his companion's sprightly staccato.

"So you shall. A pair of innocents abroad who can run the gauntlet as we've done, without getting hit, can go anywhere, and do almost anything they want to. I say, though, look here. There's a bullet been through this sleeve. That was pretty close. Haven't you got any souvenirs? Hullo! What's the matter?"

He ended on a sharp note of sudden alarm. Oliver, after swaying gently from side to side, had slid down, and lay in a heap on the floor of the car.

In a moment, Marchfield took the wheel and slowed down. Then he pulled out an electric torch and bent over the huddled body.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "What a fool I am! He's been hit twice and he's bleeding like a stuck pig!"

## XXV

“Isn’t there any hope at all ? ” asked Roll.  
The doctor shook his head.

“Not the very least. It’s no good telling lies. They’re nasty wounds, and he’s no stamina. He was never meant for this sort of work. It’s a miracle he didn’t die in the car.”

“How long ? ”

“A few hours perhaps.”

“Will he come to ? ”

“I think so, but one can’t be sure.”

. . . . .

When Oliver opened his eyes and looked wonderingly on the lavish decorations around him—the gilt, the great mirrors, and the frisky goddesses on the walls, his first thought was that he had, in some surreptitious way, found access to a sadly disappointing heaven ; his second, that he was going to dine at a first-class continental hotel. The latter conjecture was not far wrong, for, until the war came, the ward in which he was lying had been the dining-room of the Hôtel Pomme d’or. Then a hand touched his. He turned quickly, and saw Roll. Instantly he came back to himself and to the present. He looked hard at his boy, and gradually a smile lit up his face, already very fine-drawn and faintly tinged with a shadowy grey. His voice was low but perfectly clear.

“We were both of us in time, then,” he said, and added, after a pause, “Isn’t it kind?”

Then the doctor came forward.

. . . . .

When he had finished, the father and the son were left alone. By some miracle, just for the moment, this emergency hospital was not overcrowded, and a screen was drawn round the bed.

“Tell me about yourself,” said Oliver.

“Oh, I got a clout on the head from a bit of a shell. It knocked me silly, and they thought it was ever so much worse than it really was.”

Again the smile.

“It’s spoilt your good looks, for the time.”

Roll had been warned not to excite his father, but he could not keep back the exclamation that rose on his lips.

“Oh, Dad, if only they hadn’t sent you that telegram!”

The smile still lingered.

“There are more ways than one of making a man,” he answered. “Life would have found another arrow.”

For the moment Roll thought his mind was wandering.

“I don’t quite understand,” he murmured.

“Don’t you, dear boy? It seems so plain to me. Just now when the doctor was at work it all came to me in a moment. *Trust life*—you



remember my telling you about someone who said that to me ? ”

The young man nodded.

“ Well, sometimes I’ve believed, and sometimes I’ve doubted. Now, at the very end, I see she was quite right, poor Sophie. Life gave me you, and now it has saved me from myself.”

“ You don’t want any saving ! ” cried Roll impetuously. “ Oh, Dad, I’m so proud of you ! They say it’s a D.S.O. for certain.”

“ That was you again. I heard you calling, calling. It wasn’t courage, it was love, and I know now that love is stronger than fear. But, Roll, I’ll tell you a secret.”

“ Yes, Father dear.”

“ All my life I’ve hated myself for being such a coward. And now it seems to me as if life has really shaken it out of me. I’m not afraid of dying—not a bit—not even of leaving you and Winnie. Tell Uncle Bertie I said that—he knows what I was—at school, and since. Good-bye, Roll, my dear, dear—give my love—Winnie—good-bye.”

His voice trailed away in utter weakness.

Roll buried his face in the bedclothes.

“ Oh no, Father dear ! Not that.”

The smile came back, and—with an obvious effort—the voice too.

“ Well, *au revoir*, then.”

He lay quite still for a few minutes, evidently absorbed in his thoughts. Then he spoke again, in a very quiet, easy tone.

“School—that’s just what life is like. I’ve been an awful dunce. I’ve broken bounds and done all kinds of things. And yet, after all, I think I’m going to get my remove. Trust the Head, Roll. He is so strong—and kind—and wise—and good.”

THE END









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